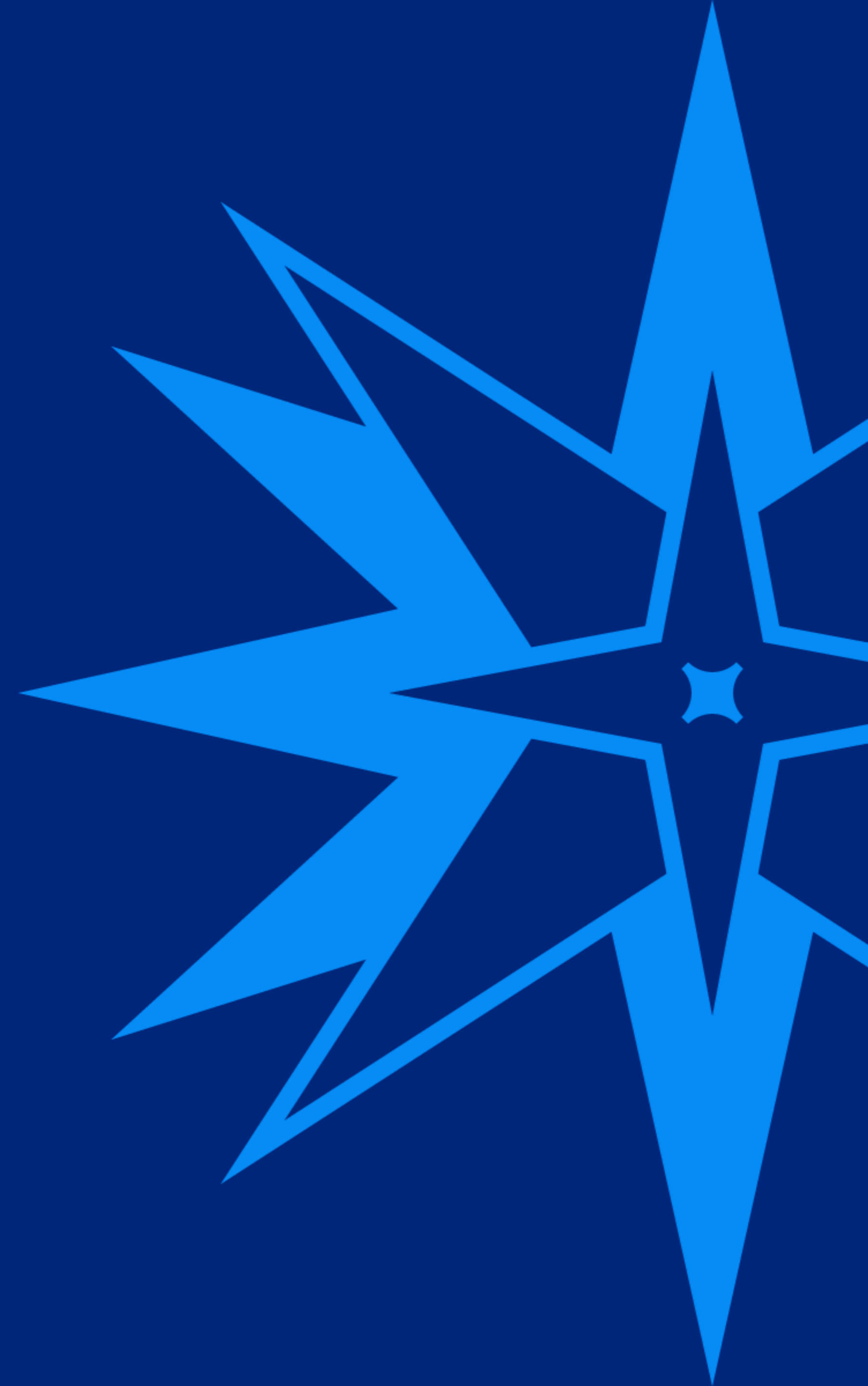


# **Advanced Boundaries: Trauma-Informed Ministry**

**Keystone Conference**

**June 5, 2026**

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# The Rev. Darryl W. Stephens, PhD

clergy, author, speaker, professor  
[www.ethicsconsidered.com](http://www.ethicsconsidered.com)



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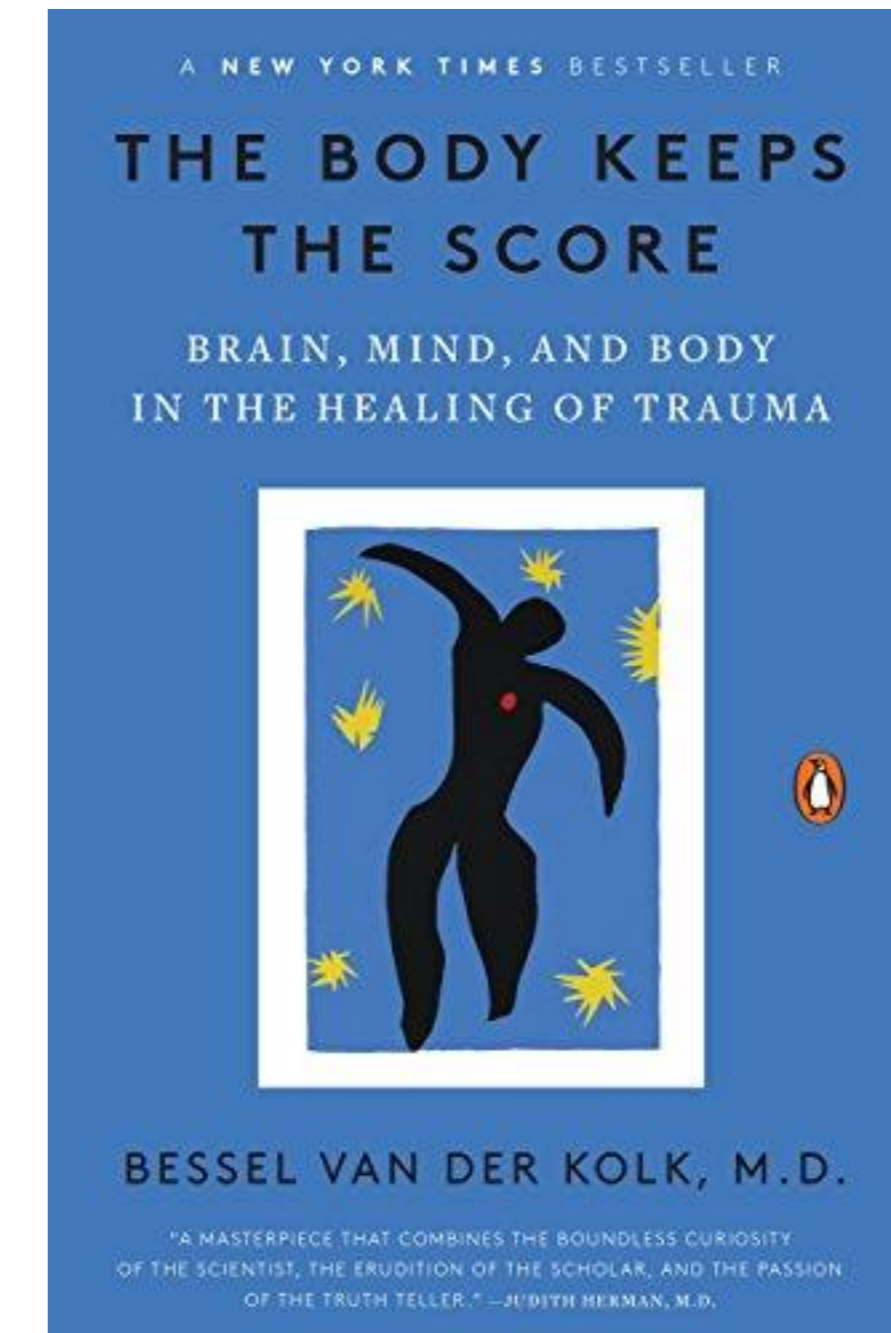
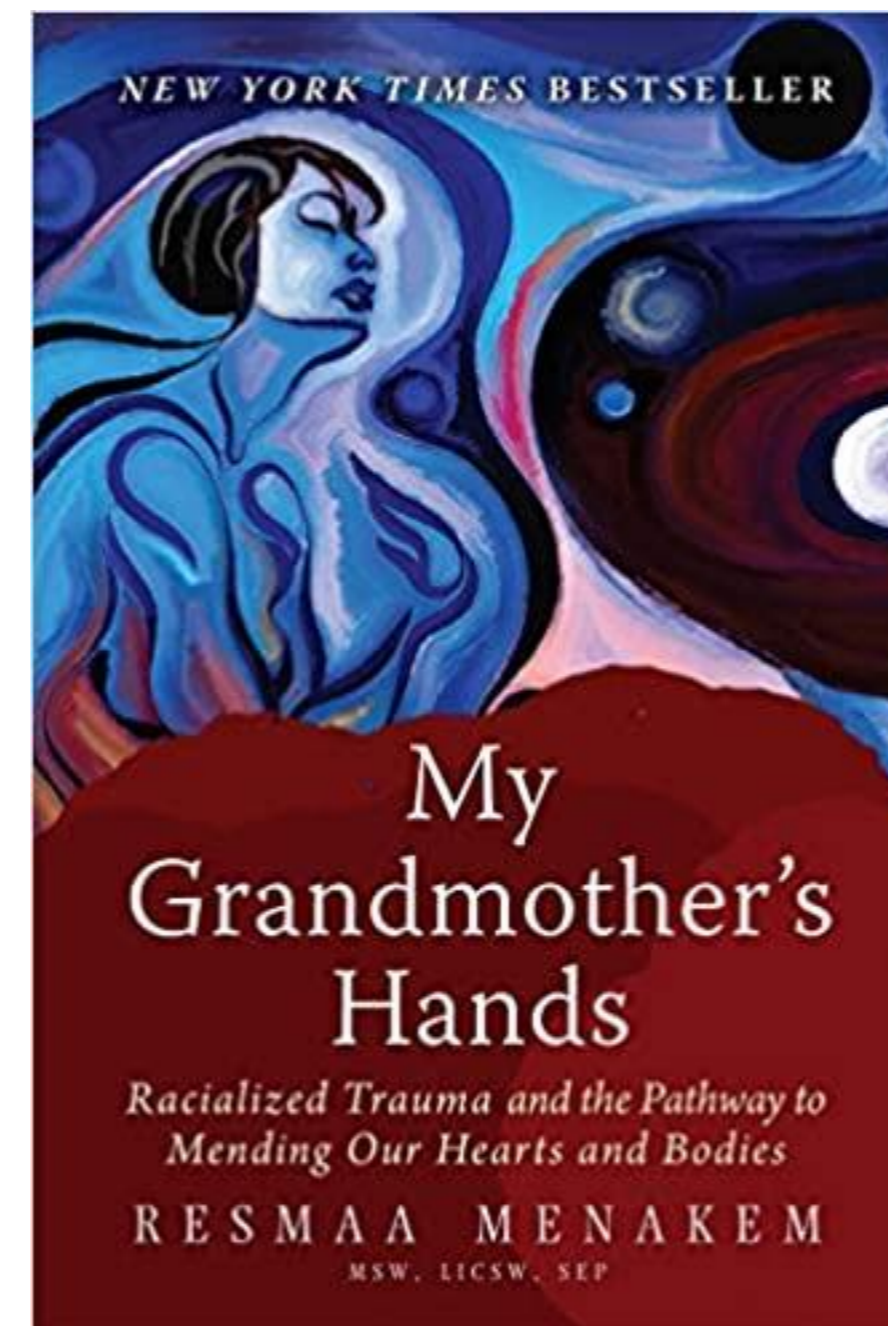
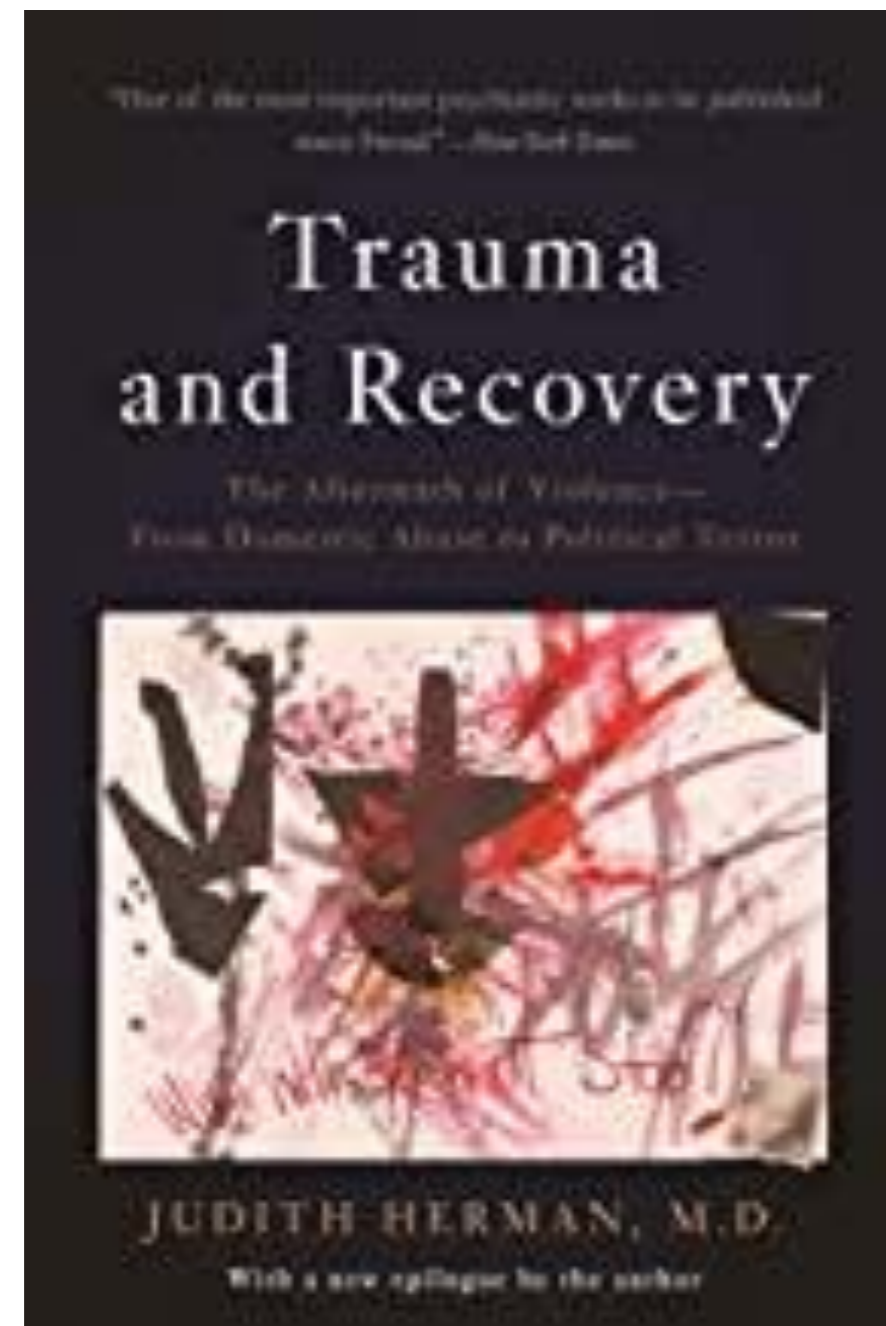
# Purpose of this Interactive Workshop

Promote congregational healing and resilience by learning to:

- Define and recognize trauma
- Implement trauma-informed response
- Offer appropriate care to others and to self
- Practice referrals, transparency, and safety

Today's method: presentation, case studies, and discussion.

# Books on Trauma



# Resources

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

**SAMHSA**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

Search SAMHSA

Find Treatment Practitioner Training Public Messages Grants Data Programs Newsroom

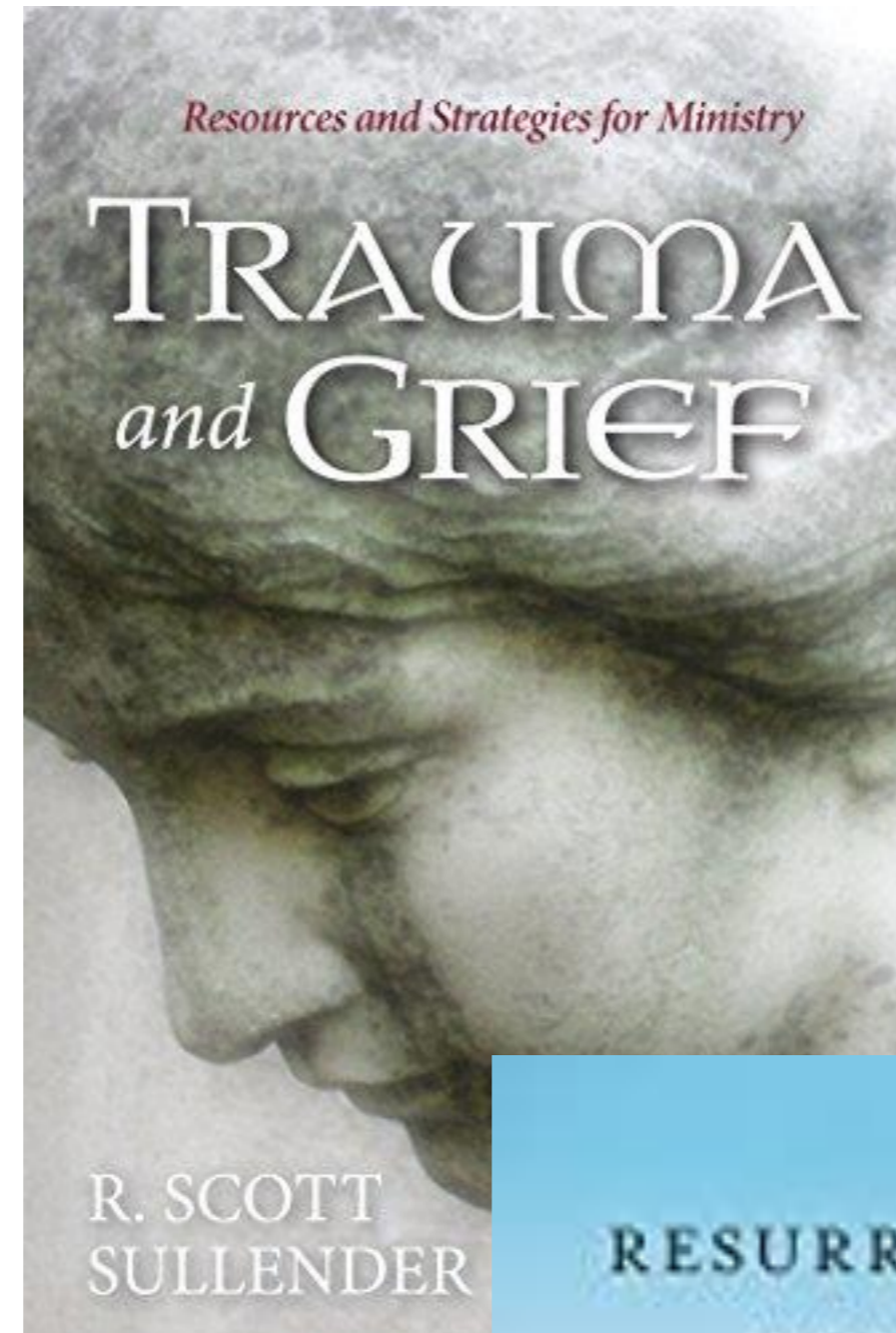
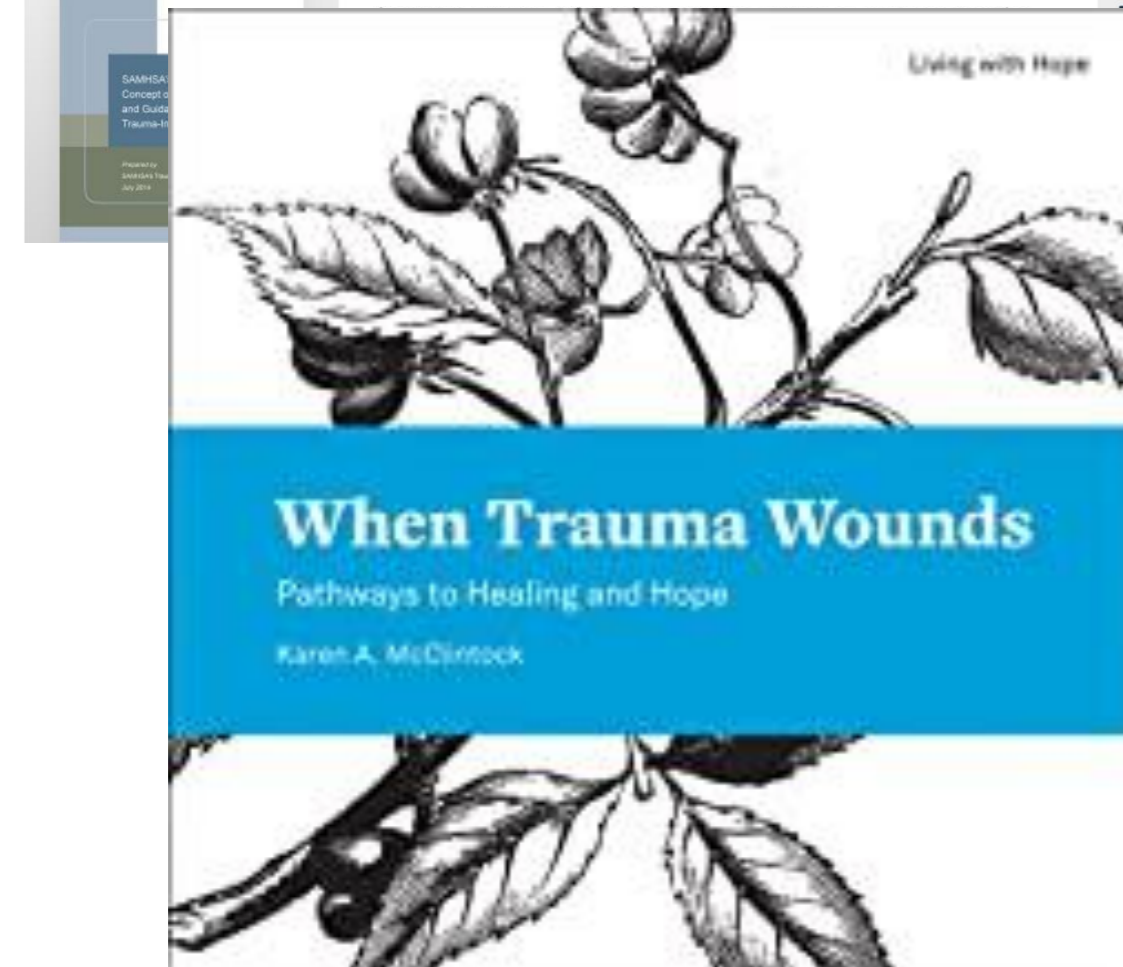
Publications and Digital Products

Log

Start a New Search

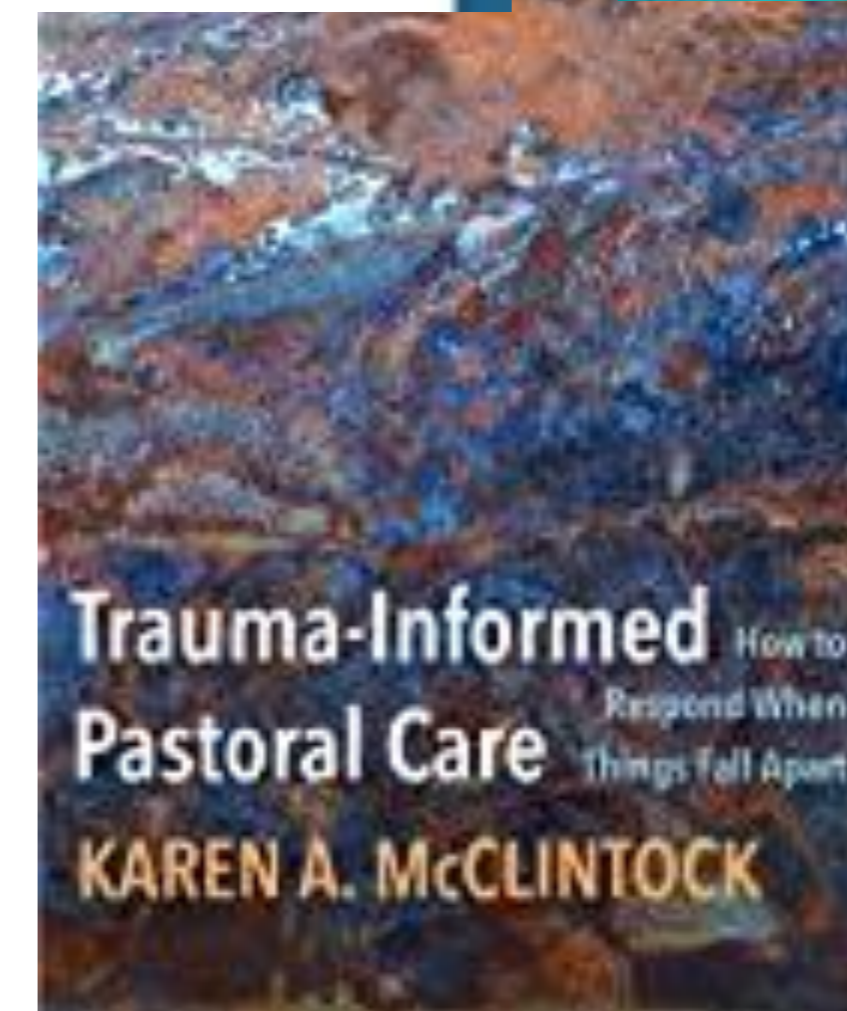
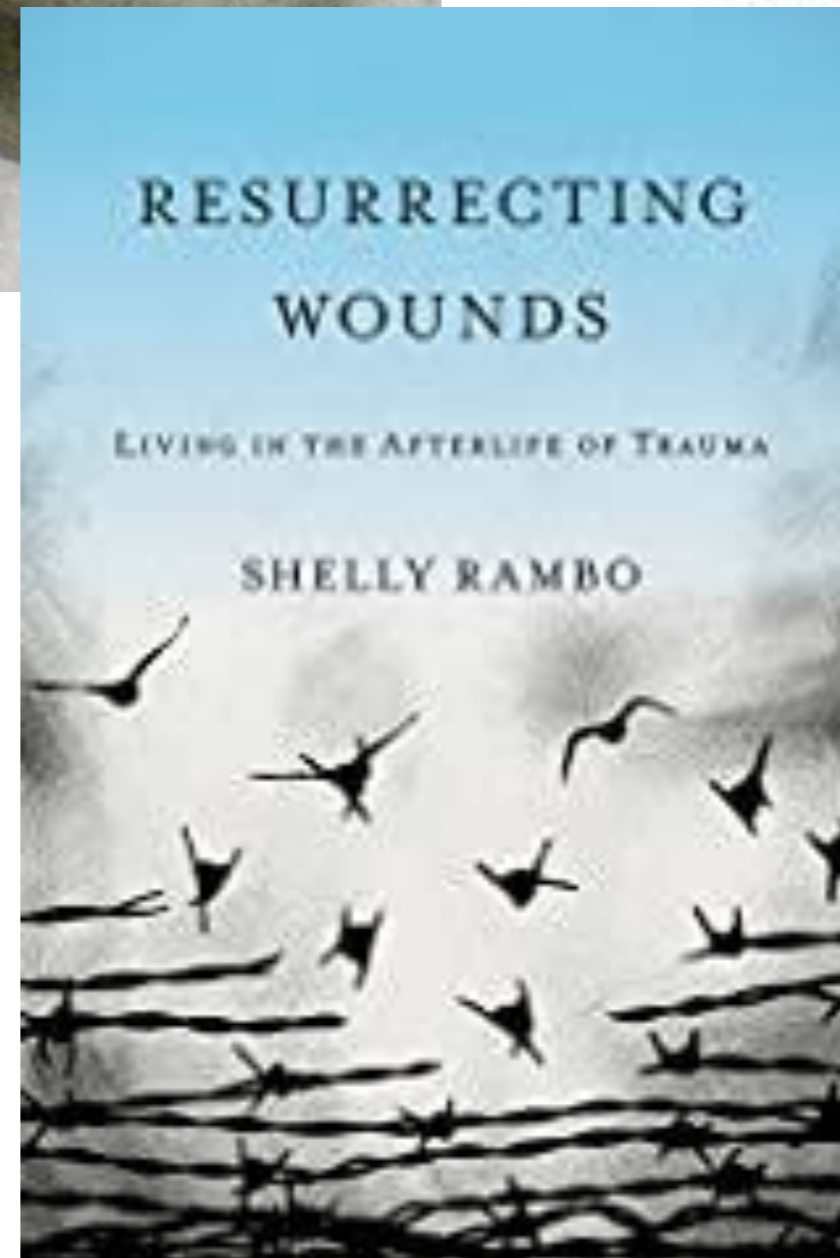
## SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach

This manual introduces a concept of trauma and offers a framework for



Theology in a Ruptured World

Serene Jones  
Foreword by Holly Brown Douglas,  
author of *Stand Firm Ground*



Tragedies and Christian  
Congregations  
The Practical Theology of Trauma  
Edited by  
Megan Warner, Christopher Swartz, Katha A.  
Green-Miller and Hilary Iron

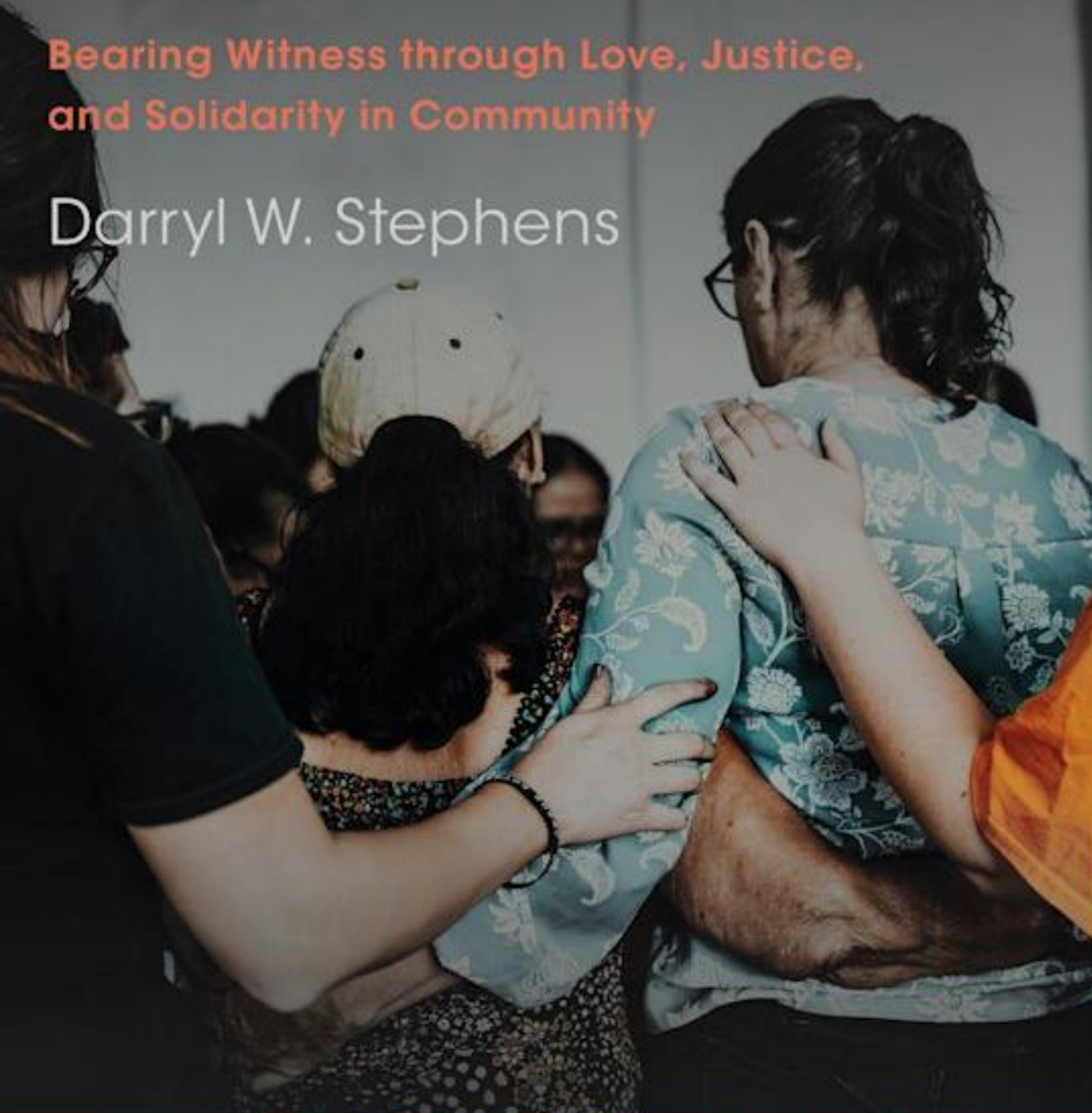


t&tclark

# TRAUMA- INFORMED CHRISTIAN ETHICS

*Bearing Witness through Love, Justice,  
and Solidarity in Community*

Darryl W. Stephens



T&T CLARK ENQUIRIES IN EMBODIMENT, SEXUALITY, AND SOCIAL ETHICS

# Bearing Witness Through Love, Justice, and Solidarity in Community

T&T Clark Enquiries in Embodiment, Sexuality, and Social  
Ethics series

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/traumainformed-christian-ethics-9780567700452/>

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# Defining Trauma

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# Definition of Trauma

Trauma is the lingering effect  
of horrific or life-threatening events,  
adversely affecting everyday functioning and well-being.

# Three E's

“Individual trauma results from an **EVENT**,  
series of events or set of circumstances that is  
**EXPERIENCED** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening  
and that has lasting adverse **EFFECTS**  
on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.”

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*

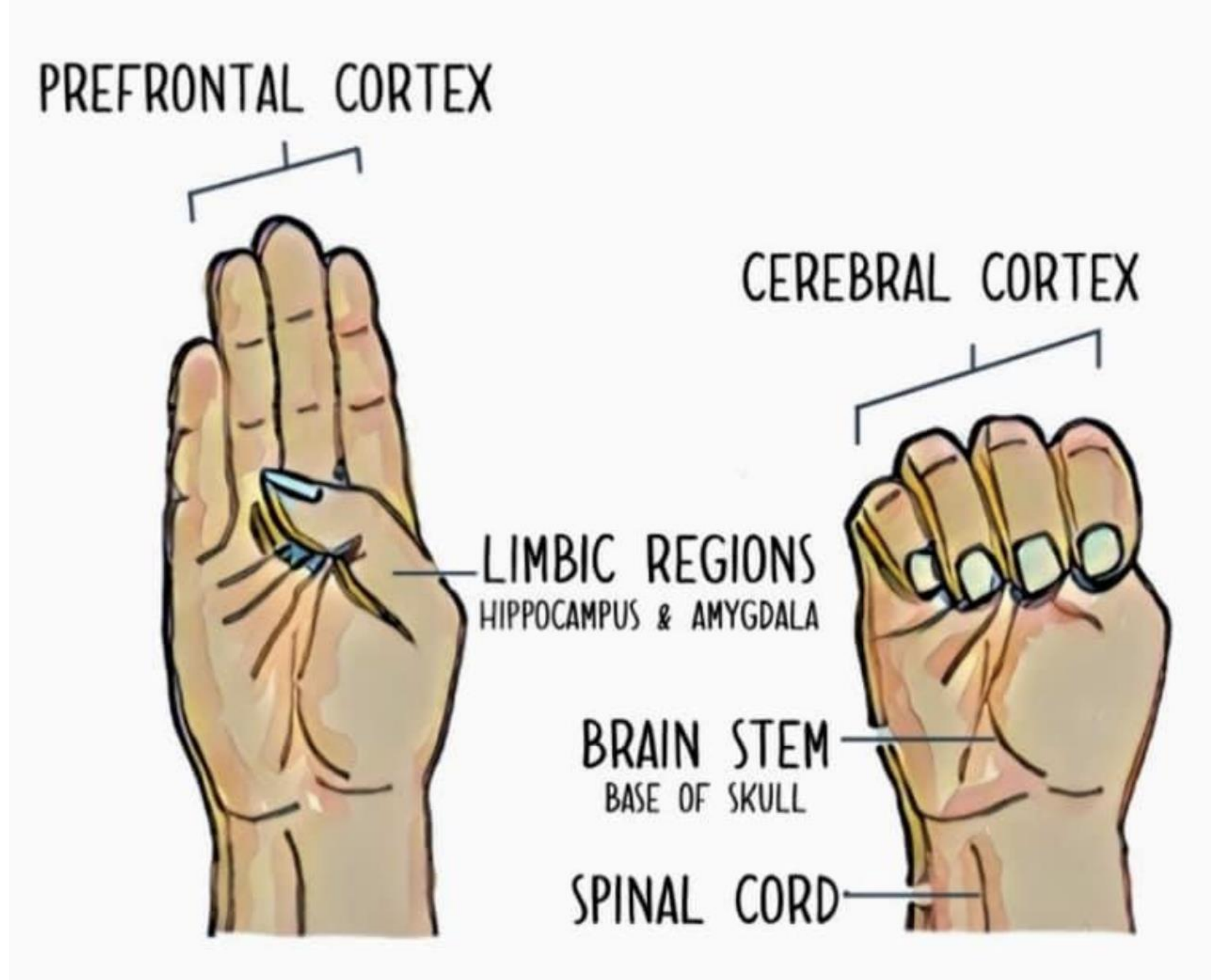
# TRAUMA BASICS

## Trauma

- is a **survival response** when mortally threatened
- **overwhelms** normal coping mechanisms
- is the **wound** resulting from the event
- is experienced **uniquely** by each person
- resides deep in the **body**
- is physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually **disruptive**

# Hand Model of the Brain

By Dr. David Siegel



# TRAUMAS

**individual**

**complex**

**collective**

**vicarious / secondary**

**physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual**

**intergenerational or epigenetic**

**socio-cultural**

# COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Groups as well as individuals can experience trauma.

- ❖ Natural disasters
- ❖ COVID and social distancing
- ❖ Systemic racism
- ❖ Prolonged conflict
- ❖ Betrayal and abuse of power

# RESILIENCE

- ❖ The capacity to bounce back
- ❖ Determined by
  - prior trauma history,
  - environmental and cultural factors,
  - personality,
  - social supports and care

*We can strengthen resilience in others through our care and support.*

# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALING





# Trauma-Informed Response

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# TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE

Instead of asking, “What’s wrong with you?”  
a trauma-informed minister asks,  
**“What has happened to you?”**

**Trauma-informed care is a shift in approach  
from blame and shame to empathy and support.**

# Compare to Americans with Disabilities Act

ADA compliance benefits everyone:

- . Public accommodations
- . Hospitality
- . Inclusion
- . Proactive



**ADA**  
Americans with  
Disabilities Act

# PRINCIPLES & VALUES of TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE



*SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*

# IMPLICATIONS OF THESE VALUES

- Every person is a beloved child of God.
- Trauma-informed care is victim-survivor centered.
- Care begins with listening and bearing witness.
- We must humbly put aside our own biases and projections.
- Don't "fix it". **INSTEAD**, empower with voice and choice.
- Neither love ". . . as yourself" nor treat others ". . . as you would have them do to you"—**INSTEAD**, ask how they want to be treated.

# THE Rs OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

- **Realize**
- **Recognize**
- **Respond**
- **Resist**
- **Reconnect**

## Discussion of Case studies

*With a partner or small group, you will address each of the Rs of trauma-informed response one at a time.*

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# REALIZE

Realize the **widespread extent** of trauma in society.

- ❖ The ACEs study (1998)
- ❖ Childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault rates
- ❖ Systemic racism
- ❖ Poverty
- ❖ Natural disasters, violence, . . . .

- Discussion of Case study

- REALIZE

- *Find a partner or small group*

- *Choose ONE of the scenarios*

- *What is the reality of trauma in the wider context?*

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# RECOGNIZE

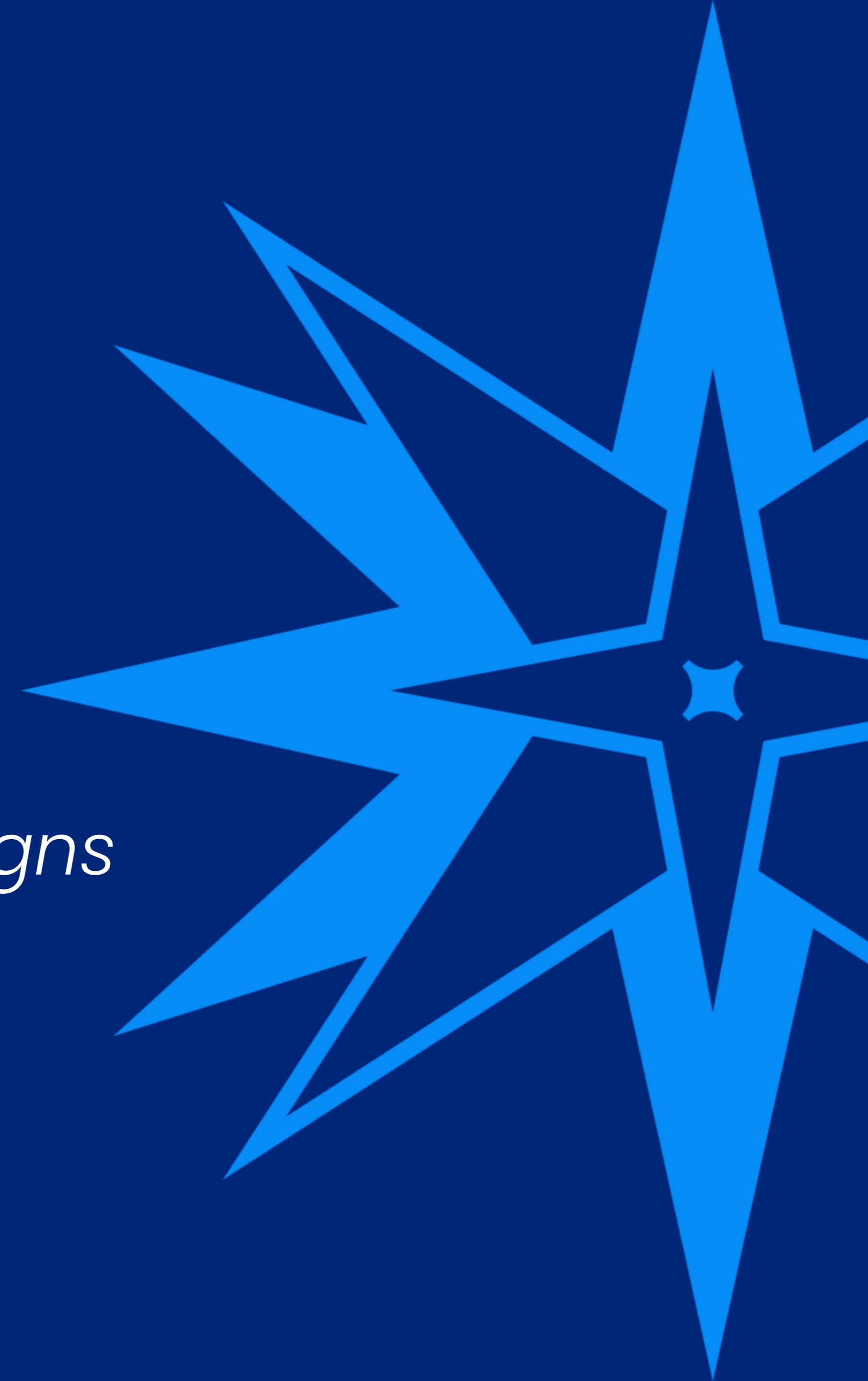
The signs and symptoms of trauma in individuals . . .

- difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling
- irregular attendance or lack of engagement
- challenges with emotional regulation
- fear of taking risks
- anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed
- withdrawal and isolation
- involvement in unhealthy relationships

*Hoch et al., cited in Davidson 2017, p. 8*

. . . and in congregations:

- Perpetual staff changes
- Lack of appropriate boundaries
- Reluctance to change
- Anger, helplessness, or disconnection under stress
- Withdrawal and isolation from the larger community or judicatory
- Secrecy and lack of transparency in communications
- Overly rigid approach to traditions, roles, and relationships



- Resume Discussion of Case study

- RECOGNIZE

- *In the same scenario, RECOGNIZE the signs and symptoms of trauma.*

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# RESPOND

Respond by integrating knowledge into practice, remembering:

- ❖ Values and principles of trauma-informed response
- ❖ Referrals and wider community support
- ❖ Distinctive practices of faith leaders

# **FAITH PRACTICES**

**Prayer**

**Ritual**

**Story**

**Accompaniment**

**Community-building**

# FAITH LEADERS DURING TRAUMA

1. Difficulty thinking, focusing
2. Take one task at a time
3. Lean on your gifts
4. Savor the sweet spots
5. Do less
6. Triage is necessary at times
7. Adapt and pivot
8. Past traumas will emerge
9. Rituals and structures of self-care
10. You're not the savior

*Adapted from Rev. Emily D. Scott*

- Resume Discussion of Case study
- RESPOND using the ADA analogy and Six Key Principles
- *In the same scenario, RESPOND*
  - 1) *in the moment*
  - 2) *in the long-term*
- *List of Faith Practices can apply to both (immediate and long-term).*

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# RESIST

Resist further harm by

- Minimizing risk of re-traumatization
- Reducing and addressing secondary (vicarious) traumatization
- Caring for the caregivers (including self)
- Debriefing the incident and planning ahead

# CARE FOR MINISTERIAL LEADERS

- risk of vicarious or secondary trauma (sometimes accompanied by compassion fatigue)
- recognition of our own trauma histories
- importance of debriefing with colleagues, pastors, counselors, and other professionals about the emotional, spiritual, and physical toll

- Resume Discussion of Case study

- RESIST further harm

- In the same scenario, RESIST retraumatizing others or causing harm to self.*

- 1) *Care for caregivers (including self)*

- 2) *Debrief the incident*

- 3) *Plan for next time by revising policies, practices, procedures*



# RECONNECT

Reconnect victims to loved ones, caring communities, and faith.

—Karen A. McClintock, *Trauma-Informed Pastoral Care*, p. 22

## **TRAUMA**

**abandonment**  
**disruption**  
**interruption**  
**isolation**  
**separation**

## **FAITH PRACTICES**

**Prayer**  
**Ritual**  
**Story**  
**Accompaniment**  
**Community-building**

## **HEALING**

**recognition**  
**re-integration**  
**re-narration**  
**solidarity**  
**re-connection**



- Resume Discussion of Case study

- RECONNECT

- *In the same scenario, RECONNECT people through trauma-informed faith practices.*

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# WRAP-UP DISCUSSION

Next steps for you and your congregation (or other ministry setting)



# COMPASS

Preparing leaders for ministry and service

- ✓ **Enrichment** ("what they didn't teach in seminary")
  - Adaptive Leadership for Ministry, Mondays, July 13 – Aug 17
  - Financial & Strategic Health in Congregations, Thursdays, Oct 15 — Nov 19
- ✓ **Members in Discernment (MIDs)**
  - Certificate in Ministry and Leadership Formation (17 six-week classes via Zoom)
  - Aligned with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry*

<https://learn.moravian.edu/browse/compass/>

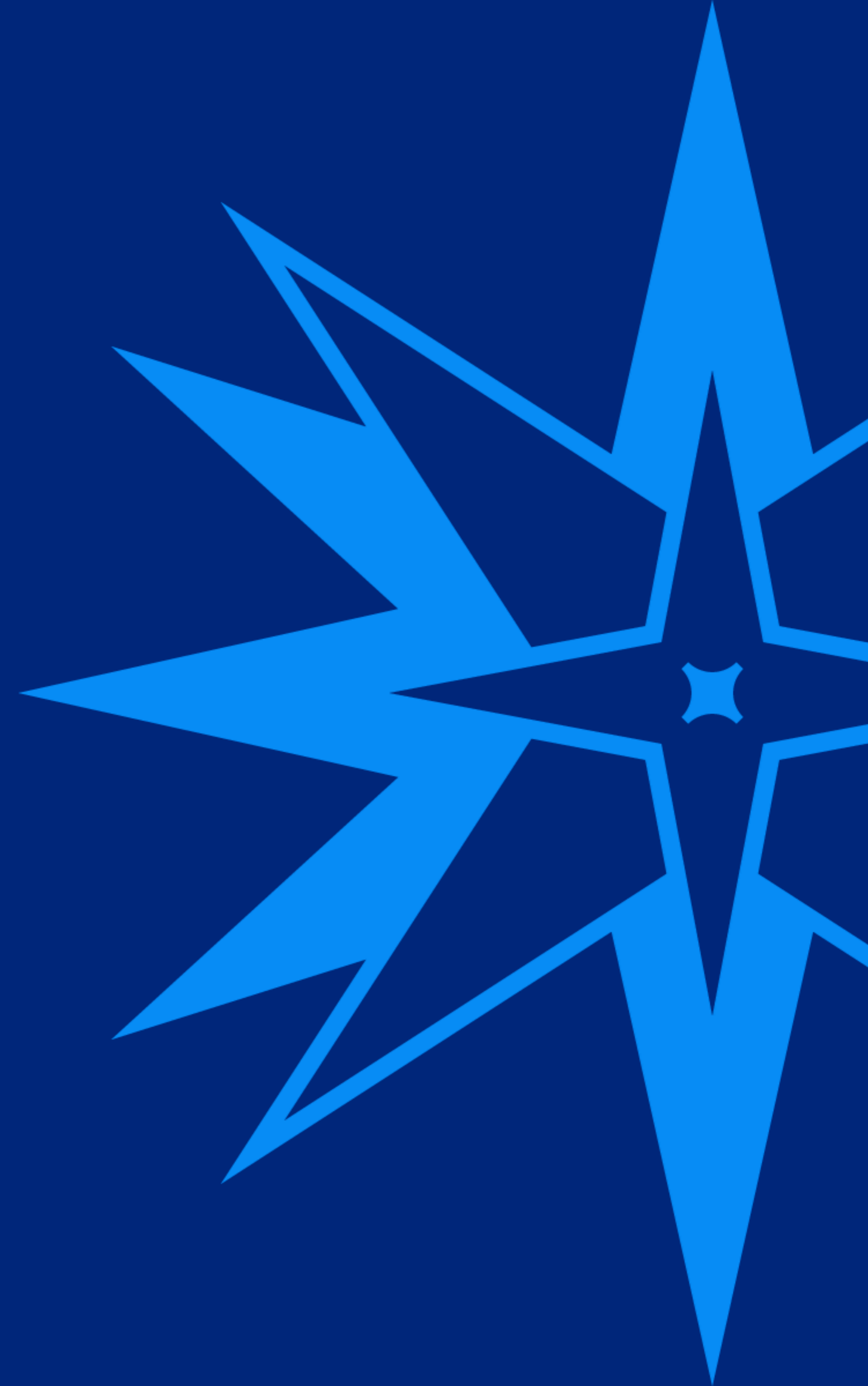
# Trauma-Informed Ministry

## QUESTIONS?

Contact: Darryl W. Stephens

[dws@darrylwstephens.com](mailto:dws@darrylwstephens.com)

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# RESOURCES FOR INTERVENTION

- National Sexual Assault Hotline (24 hrs/day): 1-800-656-4673
- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), <https://pcar.org>, Call 1-888-772-7227
- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, [www.pcadv.org](http://www.pcadv.org), 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (child abuse prevention), <https://pafsa.org/>, 1-800-448-4906
- Solihnten Institute (network including Samaritan Counseling Centers), <https://solihnten.org/find-a-center/>

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