



Healing the Mind, Body & Spirit Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy

Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars”. Kahlil Gibran

The Surviving Spirit Newsletter March 2024

March is recognized nationally as [Brain Injury Awareness Month](#) and is a time to acknowledge and support the millions of Americans affected by brain injury. According to the Brain Injury Association of America, every year, at least 2.8 million Americans sustain a traumatic brain injury.

The Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA) leads the nation in observing Brain Injury Awareness Month. This year, we have exciting new developments for the brain injury community, including a new awareness campaign, advocacy initiatives, events, fundraising opportunities, new publications, and more.

[Maine mass shooter’s brain tissue showed signs of traumatic injury but not CTE](#) by Katherine Dillinger @ CNN

“I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.” - Hellen Keller

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“You find peace not by rearranging the circumstances of your life, but by realizing who you are at the deepest level.” - Eckhart Tolle

1] [Can Music Heal Trauma? Exploring the Therapeutic Powers of Sound](#) by Jayson Greene

Article excerpt - An increasing number of music therapists are now treating people touched by traumas both big and small, highlighting humanity’s deepest connections with music in the process.

Imagine you are a newborn baby in an intensive care unit. Maybe you were born prematurely, or didn’t get enough oxygen during the delivery. There might be an IV in your tiny arm, with a small board holding it down so you can’t rip it out. You might have a tube going into your nose. You are alone, finally stabilizing after a traumatic event. But then, the doctors come in.

“It’s as if you are finally safe in your nice warm bed and suddenly, out of nowhere, someone rips the sheets off of you, opens the window to let the freezing cold air in, shines bright lights in your face—and you’re powerless,” says Christine Vaskas Churba, a music therapist at The Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine at Mount Sinai hospital in New York. Vaskas Churba works in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and these babies are her patients. They are creatures of touch and sound whose physiological systems are still in development. How can they be soothed in an environment where they are lost, terrified, uncomprehending?

Terrified babies, stuck in fight-or-flight mode, attach to these familiar noises and slowly calm themselves down. They begin to breathe more naturally on their own and nurse more successfully. They transition more peacefully into sleep, and research even indicates that the music helps increase oxygen saturation. These are all benefits associated with babies being allowed to remain on a mother’s chest; but in the NICU, where that is not possible, music and tones do the work, standing in for nature.

“I believe music is like medicine. Like a good tonic, it can open your mind, strengthen and possibly even cure you. Music can work on many levels, and nothing I know of possesses the healing force that exists within music.” - Burning Spear

“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.” – Charles Dickens

2] [How one prison unit is helping prisoners with developmental disabilities](#) By Claudia Lauer @ AP News

Article excerpt - Prisoners with developmental disabilities face unique challenges. One facility is offering solutions.

“You are the Lighthouse in someone’s storm,” reads the message above a mural of a sailboat bobbing on ocean waves under a cloud-studded azure sky. It’s an unexpected slogan for a prison wall.

On a nearby door painted deep blue, a bright yellow Minion character offers “Ways to say hello,” lists of suggestions about how prisoners incarcerated in a segregated unit of Pennsylvania’s State Correctional Institution at Albion can best greet each other. A handful of “sensory” rooms in the unit offer calming blue walls where harsh fluorescent lighting is dimmed by special covers.

The unique environment is part of a program aimed at providing better serving prisoners with intellectual or developmental disabilities, a growing population that has presented a challenge for corrections officials as they try to balance the need for security with accommodations, according to experts.

Such prisoners often struggle with overstimulation, inflexibility and trouble with complex directions, resulting in strong reactions that can lead to further discipline. They also grapple with social boundaries, making them more vulnerable to abuse, violence or manipulation in prison, said Steven Soliwoda, creator of Albion’s Neurodevelopmental Residential Treatment Unit.

In a regular prison setting, many of these prisoners with autism and similar disabilities “would normally have kind of gotten through their incarceration just quietly,” said Soliwoda, who is also program manager at Albion. “Maybe they would have been a recluse or spent a lot of time in their cell. But their voices are heard in the program and they develop that independence and the social skills they need to survive when they get out of here.”

There is no comprehensive count of how many prisoners in the U.S. have autism or intellectual disabilities, though some studies estimate more than 4% are autistic and almost 25% reported having cognitive impairments, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics — nearly twice the rate of each in the overall population. Many advocates believe the number could be much higher because of underdiagnosis before prison or because of ineffectual or nonexistent screening at some corrections departments.

“You have trust in what you think. If you splinter yourself and try to please everyone, you can't.” - Annie Leibovitz

“It’s not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something. May I suggest that it be creating joy for others, sharing what we have for the betterment of person-kind, bringing hope to the lost and love to the lonely.” – Leo Buscaglia

3] [Exercise even better than anti-depressants at treating depression, study finds](#) @ Sky News

Article excerpt - Walking, jogging, yoga and strength training appeared to be the most effective types of exercise, according to a major new analysis.

The more vigorous the exercise, the better, according to a research team led by academics in Australia, but even low intensity exercises such as walking and yoga had meaningful benefits.

The effect of exercise appeared superior to anti-depressants, according to the study which has been published in The BMJ.

But when exercise was combined with anti-depressants, this improved the effect of the drugs.

They also found that the benefit of exercise was comparable with that of cognitive behavioural therapy, but the quality of evidence supporting therapy was higher.

Researchers drew their findings from 218 clinical trials involving more than 14,000 people from multiple countries.

"Exercise is an effective treatment for depression, with walking or jogging, yoga and strength training more effective than other exercises, particularly when intense.

"Yoga and strength training were well tolerated compared with other treatments.

"Variety of form and brilliancy of color in the object presented to patients are an actual means of recovery." - Florence Nightingale

"Life is too short to waste time hating anyone." – Unknown

4] [Imagine Nation](#) by author Denise Fletcher Books @ Amazon.com:

Imagine Nation is a collection of my creative writing. This book is an exercise in experimental writing. I have written a wide range of poetic forms using many poetic devices. I enjoy exploring the creative process. The power of poetry and prose lies in its ability to give me a voice to speak my own truths. I love writing to express my ideas, thoughts, and emotions. I enjoy word play and exploring my imagination, while at the same time experimenting with various poetic forms. Writing helps me explore both my inner and outer world. It also helps me recognize areas of my life where I need to change, and motivates me to reach toward higher aspirations. Poetry also teaches us to listen to the rhythms of nature and to be awake to the world around us. Our dreams come alive through healing words.

"We need to start work with the idea that we're going to learn every day. I learn, even at my position, every single day." - Chanda Kochhar

"The best minds in mental health aren't the docs. They're the trauma survivors who have had to figure out how to stay alive for years with virtually no help. Wanna learn how to psychologically survive under unfathomable stress? Talk to abuse survivors." - Dr. Glenn Patrick Doyle

5] [Reclaiming Peer Support: Make Your Credential Work For You](#) By [Laysha Ostrow, PhD](#) @ Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation

Article excerpt - A vast majority (90%) of the public agrees that [there is a mental health crisis in the United States](#). The causes of this collective crisis are numerous, but regardless of where you live or work, you likely know someone who has struggled to get the support they need for emotional distress, drug use, or despair. Maybe you have been that person.

Over the past three decades, and around the country, *peer support specialists* (sometimes called peer supporters, certified peer specialists, or simply “peers”) have entered mental health service agency’s workforce. While [each state has its own training and credentialing process](#), all peer support specialists have personal experience of mental health or substance use challenges – including depression, [thoughts of suicide](#), drinking or drug use, [hearing voices](#), [autism](#), and in some cases may be family members.

Unlike mutual support groups (such as AA, which is run by volunteers), peer support specialists are paid professionals who receive training to use their lived experience to help others. Peer support means connecting with others who are struggling with similar issues by relating as a compassionate equal and empowering them to choose their own path to recovery. It has a positive impact on both [service users](#) and [the peer support specialist](#).

Peer support specialists pursue this line of work because they want to give back and help others. They are generally [satisfied with their jobs](#), making it an appealing career opportunity. However, they also face barriers that other healthcare professionals do not. Many peer support specialists say that they don’t have enough prospects for career advancement.

Compared to other healthcare workers performing similar jobs, they are [paid relatively low wages](#) (\$15-18/hour), struggle to find jobs, and often lack financial security. We hear from peer support specialists that coworkers don’t respect their work or understand their role, and it may be difficult to obtain disability accommodations. Disparities are particularly problematic for [women and BIPOC individuals](#).

“I need to listen well so that I hear what is not said.” - Thuli Madonsela

“The art of healing comes from nature, not from the physician. Therefore the physician must start from nature, with an open mind.” - Paracelsus

6] [How to Heal From Trauma: 10 Strategies That Can Help](#) By [Ariane Resnick, CNC](#) @ Verywell Mind

Medically reviewed by [Sabrina Romanoff, PsyD](#)

Article excerpt - If you have recently dealt with a traumatic event, you might be worried that you're going to feel lousy indefinitely. While it can certainly take some time to feel fully happy and healthy again, there are many steps you can take to help you move forward. Know that you will indeed be OK again and that you have the power to make your healing journey an effective one.

This article discusses how to heal from trauma. First, we'll first look at exactly what trauma is so you

can be clear that it's what you're experiencing, then we'll share various steps you can take and tips you can try.

If you feel shocked, saddened, anxious, or otherwise overwhelmed by an occurrence like one of the above, you're probably experiencing trauma. The trauma isn't the event or experience itself but rather your body and mind's response to it. [Traumatic stress affects the brain](#),¹ which makes it crucial to take steps toward recovery and mitigate its negative effects and impacts² as much as possible.

First and foremost, getting past trauma is to want to heal and be willing to accept the help and support. It might turn out that much of your healing journey occurs alone, or it might involve a lot of community support or individual therapy. Whichever route it's going to take naturally, you'll have the best chance of recovering well if you are in the space of accepting support.

You might receive support from loved ones, a support group, a therapist, or from friends or colleagues. The important part here is to get into a mindset where you understand that others may likely be able to help you, and you are willing to take that help.

“It is for every normal human being to be an artist. It is his divine heritage, every child is an artist. Human society kills it in us before we reach maturity.” - Dudley Crafts Watson

“If you get, give. If you learn, teach.” – Maya Angelou

7] [Does My Child or Teen Need Mental Health Support?](#) - SAFE Project [[Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic](#)]

Article excerpt - How many times have you heard this?

“She’s just so moody.” “It’s just a phase they’re going through.”

When we were teens, our behaviors or mood swings were simply written off as “being a teenager”, “out of sorts”, or “growing pains.” It may not have been till years later that we were finally diagnosed with anxiety, depression, or, with help, finally understood that we were simply reacting to stress at school or at home.

Right now, the pandemic has taken an enormous toll on everyone, with a particularly hard impact on mental health, especially that of young people. The fact is that mental health insurance claims for US teens roughly doubled early in the COVID-19 pandemic over the same period in 2019, according to a [report](#) released in early March 2021.

Young people are particularly susceptible because of school closures and distance learning, the inability to interact with friends, added stress, and loneliness. Whether it’s the loss of connection to friends or the new 24/7 living in close quarters with family – it all adds to the normal stressors that simply go along with growing up.

“There is a role for every one of us in supporting youth mental health. The rates of poor mental health for young people are rising at alarming levels, according to many studies including the [CDC](#) and [Monitoring the Future](#),” says Ronna Yablonski, Senior Director of [SAFE Choices](#), a student-driven

outreach and prevention program empowering youth in schools and communities. “There are many contributing factors, but the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the circumstances.”

What’s the best thing we can do to protect our children and teens? Yablonski says the leading protective factor is to help them build healthy connections and strong bonds and relationships with adults and peers at school, in the family, and in the community. “Kids and teens are not immune from mental challenges and disorders. When occurring simultaneously with a substance use disorder, it is referred to as co-occurring disorders, comorbid disorders, or a dual diagnosis. Early recognition and professional help can lead to successful treatment and full recovery.”

“[E]very child is an artist until he's told he's not an artist.” - John Lennon

“We don't need no more danger, we don't need no more difficulties, we don't need no more misunderstanding, and we don't need no more violence. We need the people to see each other and know of each other, feel each other, touch each other, share with each other, and change hearts with each other.” - Burning Spear

8] [Wheelchair Reflections of Sacred Wonder](#) by author Christina Chase

Although crippled by disease, I'm fully alive in love. I write about the terrible beauty and sacred wonder of life, while living with physical disability and severe dependency. A revert to the Catholic faith through atheism, I'm not afraid to ask life's big questions. I explore what it means to be fully human through my weekly blog and have written a book: [It's Good to Be Here](#), published by Sophia Institute Press.

“When artists give form to revelation, their art can advance, deepen and potentially transform the consciousness of their community.” - Alex Grey

“Live every day as if it were going to be your last; for one day you’re sure to be right.” – Harry Morant

9] [California wants to force people into mental health care. Advocates say it will backfire](#) by Maanvi Singh @ The Guardian

Article excerpt - Proposed reform of state’s system would fund locked institutions, and probably take funds from preventive care

California’s Proposition 1 – the only statewide measure on the ballot – would significantly restructure California’s mental health system.

It is also one of the most complex and convoluted measures voters have had to decide on in recent years. The full text of the proposition in the state’s 112-page voter guide takes up 68 pages.

The measure has two parts. First, it would raise \$6.4bn over 20 years to build more housing and treatment facilities for people with mental health and substance use disorders. It would also enact new requirements on how the state’s mental health budget would be spent – redirecting about a third toward housing and rental assistance for unhoused people with serious mental illness or addiction, and another

35% toward treatments for that population.

California's governor, Gavin Newsom, who proposed the measure as a crucial part of his plans to solve the state's dire homelessness crisis, has said it would "prioritise getting people off the streets, out of tents and into treatment". Opponents, including disability rights activists, mental health advocates and the American Civil Liberties Union, countered that it would take money away from community-based preventative mental health programs to finance locked-door psychiatric institutions and involuntary treatment.

"It's good politics, as Newsom positions himself to run for president in 2028," said Samuel Jain, a senior policy attorney for Disability Rights California, an advocacy group. "It's not good policy."

"Physicians need to be good technicians and know how to prescribe, but for healing to occur they also need to incorporate philosophy and spirituality into their treatment. We need to feel as well as think." - Bernie Siegel

"I learned compassion from being discriminated against. Everything bad that's ever happened to me has taught me compassion." - Ellen DeGeneres

10] [International Survey of Electroconvulsive Therapy](#) by John Reed Ph.D @ Psychology Today

Article excerpt - The first-ever online survey of ECT patients and their loved ones just launched.

Key points

- ECT research typically reports the subjective opinions of the prescribing psychiatrists.
- Several old, small studies that asked ECT patients themselves found less favourable outcomes.
- The first international survey of ECT recipients, relatives, and friends is now available to be completed.

Five co-researchers and I have just launched the first-ever [international survey](#) of people who have received electroconvulsive [therapy](#) (ECT), called electroshock therapy in the United States.

The survey is also unique in that it is the first to simultaneously survey the relatives and friends of ECT recipients.

The research team includes three women who have had ECT themselves, from England, Northern Ireland, and the United States.

The survey, a draft of which was reviewed by Mind, the United Kingdom's largest mental health nongovernmental organization, includes questions on the positive and negative effects of the treatment. It also covers what information patients and relatives were given before the treatment.

In addition, there are questions about the causes of the problems for which ECT was prescribed, such as [depression](#), and whether the social causes (such as [loneliness](#), [bereavement](#), abuse, and poverty) were addressed before resorting to ECT.

“We can’t help everyone, but everyone can help someone.” – Dr. Loretta Scott

“It’s so essential to happiness to speak your truth out loud - because this sharing of your core pain is what creates a necessary healing shift - from negative beliefs about the world - to positive beliefs - and frees you up to be able to fully view life with meaning, purpose and connection with others.” - Karen Salmansohn

11] [Why Do Suicidal People Not Seek Help?](#) Konrad Michel, M.D. @ Psychology Today

Article excerpt - Half of people who die by suicide do not seek help.

Key points

- In a severe emotional crisis, we may be unable to see a solution; suicide then appears as a possible way out.
- Many people with suicidal ideation do not think this is a reason to seek help.
- A recent study proposes a distress-processing model for individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Each year, thousands of people die by suicide because they do not think that they need medical treatment or that a doctor’s office or a mental health center is the right address to get help. This is particularly pertinent with the young, where a study found that two-thirds did not seek help within a month before their suicide (1).

What I learned from hundreds of interviews with people who had attempted suicide.

In an early study (2), we asked people one year after a suicide attempt which could have stopped them from harming themselves. To our surprise, 52 percent said “nobody.” Twenty-one percent mentioned relatives or friends, and only 10 percent mentioned a health professional. Fifty percent said that they could not have accepted help. My interpretation of these results was that [suicidal](#) people experience suicide as ego-syntonic, that is, as something that makes sense to them personally and that does not need treatment.

Another reason for not seeking help is [shame](#), particularly in the young. The authors of a Swedish study (3) interviewed parents of 33 boys and adolescents who had died by suicide. Shame was found to be the most frequent reason for the suicide of these young people. Shame for what they had done, shame for what happened to them, shame of physical appearance, shame for who they were.

In my clinical work with suicidal patients, I often heard that they did not know where to get help for an emotional crisis. They did not think that a doctor or a mental health service would be the right address to turn to. Or they were afraid of being sent to a [psychiatric](#) hospital against their will and “filled up with drugs.”

Tagging Suicide as a Form of Pathology Is Not Helpful

[The Suicidal Person: A New Look at a Human Phenomenon](#). By author Konrad Michel, M.D.

Both compassionate and rigorous, this book provides vital insight into suicide prevention and shows how changing attitudes will help save lives. It includes practical advice for people at risk, with special emphasis on young people, as well as for relatives and health professionals.

“Trauma happens in relationships, so it can only be healed in relationships. Art can't provide healing. It can be cathartic and therapeutic but a relationship is a three-part journey.” - Alanis Morissette

“Love and peace of mind do protect us. They allow us to overcome the problems that life hands us. They teach us to survive... to live now... to have the courage to confront each day.” - Bernie Siegel

12] [Coping With Intrusive Thoughts](#) by Vivian Manning-Schaffel @ Pocket Worthy

Article excerpt - Haunted by a reoccurring thought that freaks you out? Intrusive thoughts are more common than you think.

Have you ever had an uninvited thought creep into your head that was so irrational, anxiety-inducing, or disturbing you wanted to shake your head until it fell out? And, when you least expect it, does that same negative thought reinvade your brain and psyche you out? If so, you are by no means alone. You're simply coping with what mental health experts refer to as “intrusive thoughts.”

What are intrusive thoughts? - According to a post on the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America \(ADAA\)](#) website co-authored by [Sally Winston](#), Psychologist and Founder/Co-Director of the Anxiety and Stress Disorders Institute of Maryland, intrusive thoughts are sudden onset “stuck thoughts that cause great distress,” often focused on scary, sexual, violent, or socially unacceptable images, or even thoughts that go against one’s belief system. They can be anything that strikes you as truly horrifying.

But the good news is, for most of us, these thoughts hold no significance whatsoever, and they can — and do — happen to everyone. “Everybody has thoughts that kind of go against who they are,” says [Jonathan S. Abramowitz](#), Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and an author of studies on intrusive thoughts.

“A smile doesn't cost a cent, but draws a lot of interest.” - Unknown

“The best relationships in our lives are the best not because they have been the happiest ones, they are that way because they have stayed strong through the most tormentful of storms.” - Pandora Poikilos

13] [The Survivorship Trafficking and Extreme Abuse Online Conference 2024](#)

Low Prices until March 15th.

Survivor Conference - Saturday and Sunday May 4 - 5, 2024

Clinician's Conference - Friday May 3, 2024

Please write info@survivorship.org if you would like to get on our conference mailing list and/or are interested in speaking at our 2024 conference.

This presentation will explain how ritual abuse, mind control, and different suggestive techniques work to control sex trafficking survivors (Karriker, 2008). The presenter will describe different historical examples of how mind control and ritual abuse have been used. Legal cases will also be discussed from various parts of the world (McGonigle, 1999; New York Times, 1988). Research studies, like the Extreme Abuse Survivors Survey, will be presented, as well as examples of different cults and their techniques (Hassan, 2018). Mental health diagnoses, like Dissociative Identity Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and their origins in sex trafficking survivors will be explained. The presenter will discuss his personal experiences of being in a cult as a child experiencing torture, sexual abuse, and mind control techniques. The forced development of these diagnoses and their symptoms will be connected to how they are used to control sex trafficking survivors. Ways to expose and prevent ritual abuse, mind control, and sex trafficking will be discussed. Finally, there will be a discussion of the future of advocacy efforts to stop ritual abuse, sex trafficking, and mind control.

Neil Brick is a survivor of ritualistic abuse. His work continues to educate the public about child abuse, trauma and ritualistic abuse crimes. His child abuse and ritualistic abuse newsletter S.M.A.R.T. <https://ritualabuse.us> has been published for over 29 years. <http://neilbrick.com>

“Healing is more about accepting the pain and finding a way to peacefully co-exist with it. In the sea of life, pain is a tide that will ebb and weave, continually.

We need to learn how to let it wash over us, without drowning in it. Our life doesn't have to end where the pain begins, but rather, it is where we start to mend.” - Jaeda DeWalt

“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.” - Siddhārtha Gautama

14] [How Swimming Helped an OCD Writer Quieten Their Mind](#) by Emily Barth Isler @ Oprah Daily

Article excerpt - How a novelist used swimming laps to quiet her mind and unlock her creativity.

On a February day in 2022, I arrived at the community pool in my Southern California neighborhood and adjusted my borrowed swim cap—a hand-me-down from my daughter, who’d worn it once when she was in second grade. I’d come with a single purpose: to attempt to swim a few laps. Honestly, I had little faith in my ability to do so. I had taken swim lessons as a child, and I knew I was competent enough not to drown, but actual lap swimming felt about as likely to me as growing wings and flying like a bird. I am not a naturally athletic person, but after relocating from New York to Los Angeles, I felt like I owed it to myself to at least live out the fantasy I’d had for years of swimming outdoors for exercise.

I gave myself specific guidelines and loopholes. First, a time limit: I only had to try for 20 minutes. Next, I gave myself a mantra: “My only job is to move my body from one end of the pool to the other, in any way possible.” I told myself I could just float or gently paddle, or even walk in the shallow end.

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I did not, as per my fantasies, discover that I was preternaturally gifted at lap swimming or innately graceful in the water. I did not find it magically effortless. What I did discover, however, was that swimming laps gave me what years of yoga classes and scores of sporadically used meditation apps could not: quiet. Calm. Attention to the breath and nothing else.

As a neurodivergent person who has lived with [obsessive compulsive disorder](#) my whole life, this kind of quiet was new to me.

“There is a moment in our healing journey when our denial crumbles; we realize our experience and it's continued effects on us won't "just go away". That's our breakthrough moment. It's the sun coming out to warm the seeds of hope so they can grow our personal garden of empowerment.” - Jeanne McElvaney

“Learning to distance yourself from all the negativity is one of the greatest lessons to achieve inner peace.” - Roy T. Bennet

Thank you & Take care, Michael

PS. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know – mikeskinner@comcast.net

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A diagnosis is not a destiny

[The Surviving Spirit](#) - Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy - Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

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"BE the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi