NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

What is Complex Trauma?

A Resource Guide for Youth and Those Who Care About Them

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Dear Reader:

A 12-year old boy had been thinking about all the things he'd experienced in his life, some good and a bunch of bad. He went to an adult he trusted—his therapist—and asked if there were any brochures or books he could read on "Complex Trauma." Before the therapist could answer, the boy clarified that he wanted something written specifically for kids, not for adults. The therapist had nothing.

Hundreds of emails from one professional to another—all trying to track down such a thing—and a couple of years later, we present *What is Complex Trauma? A Resource Guide for Youth and Those Who Care About Them.*

We developed this Resource Guide for youth who have experienced, or know someone who has experienced, Complex Trauma. Older youth, adolescents, and young adults can explore the information in this guide on their own to help make sense of their experiences and understand themselves better. Clinicians, caregivers, and other adults can use this guide to have conversations—sometimes hard, but often freeing—with young adults, teens, pre-teens (and even some curious 7-9 year olds).

The youth who asked for the written resource on Complex Trauma said he wished he had better understood what he was going through and why he reacted the way he did. Once he knew what Complex Trauma was, he started to make sense of his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. He felt relieved and—though he still had some hurdles to get over—he felt hopeful. Now, he added, he wished there were some materials he could share with a friend going through similar hard times.

It is our hope that this guide will be such a resource for you. Whatever your age, and whether you read this on your own, with a friend, a caregiver, or a professional—this Resource Guide is for you.

Wishing you all the hope, optimism, determination, and support you need to heal, grow, find people you can trust, and make a better tomorrow.

Joseph Spinazzola and Mandy Habib

Part I. What is Complex Trauma?

Youth grow up in lots of different kinds of families and neighborhoods. When things go as they should they have grown ups in their lives who look out for them, show them love, and help them grow up to be healthy and strong. However, sometimes the grown ups who children and adolescents are supposed to be able to count on to help and protect them say or do really mean or hurtful things, or just aren't able to take care of them.

Life experiences matter—good, bad, and everything in between. As we grow up, both the things that happen and those that don't happen affect us. Some youth don't think what happens really matters. How about you? Some people think children and adolescents are supposed to get over what happens to them even if it's something really horrible. But for many youth, things keep bothering them long after they happened.

A Traumatic Experience Versus a Lifetime of Traumatic Experiences

Let's talk about the difference between when one really scary, awful, or sad thing happens—like being in a car accident, a hurricane, or seeing someone get hurt—compared to when lots of dangerous or hurtful things keep happening over and over again, like sexual abuse, bullying, or neglect.

Adults have a lot of names for these kinds of things: stress, tragedy, adversity, and trauma. None of these words really capture the difference between what it's like to deal with one or a couple of bad things that happened, versus living with lots of terrible things happening all the time.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

After going through a traumatic event, many youth (and adults) have a hard time forgetting what happened. Sometimes they have nightmares, or can't stop thinking about it. They can get jumpy or tense, feel afraid that the bad thing will happen again, or lose interest in things they used to like to do. These responses to trauma are normal, and aren't just "kid" problems: they happen to athletes, soldiers, police officers, firemen, and parents. Sometimes this stuff gets better on its own. When it doesn't, and people keep getting set off by things that remind them of what happened, this is called PTSD.

Complex Trauma

Sometimes, young people grow up with a lot of bad things or hardly any good things, or both. And sometimes the same bad things happen so often, youth might think that this is just how life is. There could be trouble at home, like grown ups fighting all the time or not giving children things they need like enough to eat, warm clothes, hugs, words of encouragement, or praise.

Sometimes, things are bad in a way that hurts young people on the inside, where no one can see, like when grown ups, older siblings, or peers are constantly saying terrible things about them, threatening them, or getting mad and blaming them for things that are not their fault. Some youth live in scary neighborhoods where it never feels safe outside their home.

It can be really hard when bad stuff starts to pile up. Many children and adolescents feel like there's no one around to fix things, and no one in their corner. They can feel afraid, sad, or mad a lot of the time, or blame themselves for what's going wrong. It can also be hard to trust people when you never know if someone is going to let you down, disappear, or attack you all of a sudden. If you feel like people don't care about you, you might start thinking you deserve the bad things that happen. Instead of feeling loved and special, you might not feel good about yourself. You might feel like you're really different from other people and like you don't fit in, especially if you see others having good times with their families and having grown ups they can count on. It might feel like you'll never be good at anything no matter how hard you try, and you want to just give up.

It can feel really hopeless.

When youth feel like this, it usually doesn't get better on its own. Sound complicated? You bet. That's why it's called Complex Trauma.

Normal Life, Bad Things

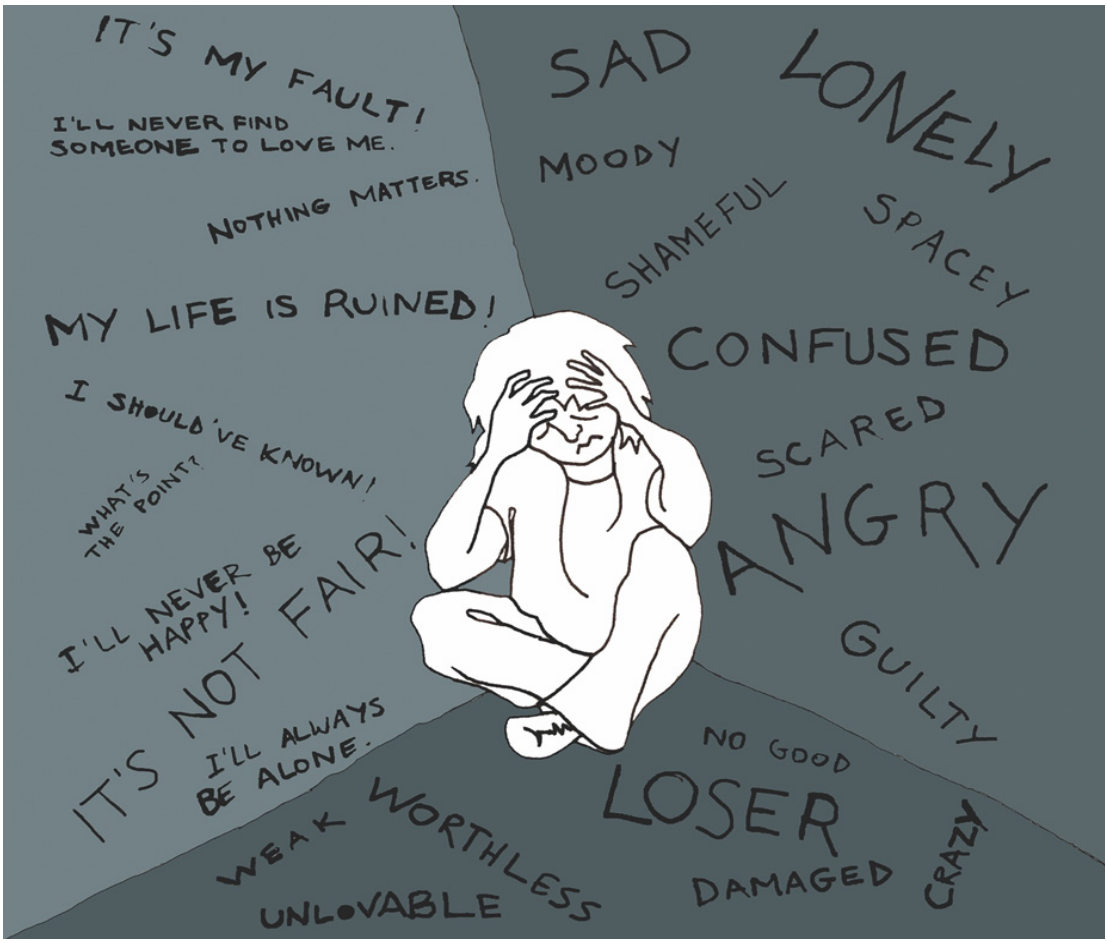
PTSD

Complex Trauma

Part II. How Complex Trauma Can Impact Me

Complex Trauma can affect people in lots of different ways. Children and adolescents with Complex Trauma often have negative thoughts, emotions, or beliefs about themselves or the world. They might have uncomfortable feelings in their bodies from living with constant stress. Living a traumatic life can make it hard for young people to have healthy relationships or imagine a good future.

Even when bad stuff happened in early childhood and was supposed to be "over" years ago, the effects of Complex Trauma can last a really long time. This can be confusing and upsetting for teens and even young adults who still feel hopeless, unhappy, stuck, lost, or unsafe even though everything is supposed to be better and different now. This can create a lot of pressure and shame, especially when adults start to get impatient, frustrated, or blame youth for not trying hard enough to change. The important thing to remember here is that this is exactly how Complex Trauma works. Just as an earthquake can cause deep foundation cracks that are the hidden cause of a building's instability even decades later, Complex Trauma can disrupt healthy development and is often the unseen cause of many problems and difficulties youth face years later that are not obviously connected to early childhood experiences.



Have you, or anyone you know, experienced any of these difficulties or negative thoughts about yourself?

Beliefs about Self	Feelings	Body Messages
I am… Weak, Worthless, Broken, Pathetic.	I feel… Sad, Moody, Angry.	I feel… Tense, Jumpy, Amped, about to Blow.
A Liar, a Sneak, a Suck-Up, a Hypocrite, a Coward, a Bully.	… Spaced Out, Distracted, Numb.	Nothing at all. I don't notice when I cut or hurt myself.
… Nobody, a Failure, a Loser, a Freak, a Skank, Trash.	… Lonely, Afraid, Ashamed.	… Like I'm floating outside my body.
… No Good, Psycho, Messed up, Crazy.	… Helpless, Hurt, Furious.	My head aches. I'm always… in Pain, Sick to my stomach, Nauseous, Fidgety, Restless, Exhausted.
… I can't do anything right.	… Confused, Insecure, Unsure.	I can't stand bright lights, loud noises or tags on my clothes.
… Stupid, School is not for me.	… Scared of myself and what happens when I lose control.	I can't make eye contact with most people.
I have to . . . Be Perfect, Fool Everyone, Convince Them to Love Me.	… Like I don't care anymore what happens to me or anyone else.	I can't deal with people standing too close to me or wanting to touch me.

Thoughts	Relationships	Beliefs about the Future
It's not fair!	I can't trust anyone. I trust the wrong people.	My life is ruined. It doesn't matter. What's the point?
I don't understand why everyone treats me this way.	Nobody wants me. Nobody likes me.	I'm never going to become anything.
Everything I touch gets ruined.	I shut everyone out. I just want to be left alone.	I don't see a future for myself. I'll be dead or in jail by the time I'm 25.
I want to . . . hurt myself, run away, die . . . I can't take it anymore.	I can't make or keep friends.	I'll never be good enough. I don't deserve to be happy.
I can't get my thoughts to stop spinning. I get lost in my head.	Relationships aren't worth it: there's always too much drama.	Happiness is for other people, not me.
I don't understand why I do some of the things I do. Sometimes I just lose it.	Everyone I care about dies, betrays me or leaves. I hurt everyone I love.	I'll never have a job. I'll never be a success. I'll never be good at anything.

Activity 1: How Complex Trauma Affects Me

Complex Trauma can affect people in lots of different ways. It can influence people's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about themselves. It can show up in body "messages:" physical problems and reactions that are signs of pain and stress resulting from trauma. It can affect people's relationships and thoughts about their future. Use this worksheet to explore the effects Complex Trauma has had on you, both in the past and currently.

Beliefs about Self

Feelings

Thoughts

Relationships

Body Messages

Beliefs about the Future

Part III. Ways Youth Cope

We all have an alarm system in our body and brain that helps us to recognize danger and threats. People who live with Complex Trauma often develop very sensitive alarms. Sometimes this can help to keep them safe. Other times the alarm goes off when something reminds them of bad things that happened in the past, even when they aren't actually happening. We call that a false alarm. Even a false alarm, however, can sound and feel as loud and scary as a real one. (Our bodies and brains have a hard time telling the difference between real and false alarms).

When youth grow up in situations where they are in danger or are mistreated or neglected a lot, they develop ways of dealing with things that help them survive. Sometimes we refer to this as our "survival system" or "survival brain." Youth can become good at knowing what other people are feeling, at being able to completely ignore their feelings, or at being ready to fight in a split second. Although these abilities make it possible for youth to get through very difficult, scary, or lonely times, these survival skills can cause problems once they become habits or when you use them when you don't really need them.

There are many ways to cope with stressful experiences, and many things people can do to relieve stress, decrease tension and anxiety, and make their bodies feel more calm and in control. Sometimes people very intentionally use strategies to cope: they practice specific skills and actively work at reducing their distress and shifting their energy to a more comfortable level. Other times people do things more instinctively: impulsively or automatically taking steps to change the way they feel, often without even realizing it. Whether done on purpose or not, some coping skills are going to be very helpful for some people, and not so much for others. What's more, some strategies people use to manage overwhelming feelings or release energy can be very powerful and effective in the moment, but also very destructive, addictive, or significantly increase risk of negative outcomes over time.

Here we will look at how some strategies used to cope with stressful experiences and feelings can cause additional problems for youth. Then in the next section we will explore healthy strategies for coping with the effects of Complex Trauma.

Examples of coping strategies* that you may use that can cause problems:

Difficult situation	What I may do to get through it or cope	How it can cause problems for me
Physical Violence or Abuse	Pay really close attention to what others feel or want and try hard to make sure they are happy.	I put the needs of others ahead of my own. Sometimes others use this to take advantage of me.
	Learn to fight really well and always be ready to fight.	I get into a lot of fights. I think others want to fight me even when they really don't.
	Learn not to feel pain so I can "take it" and just wait for it to be over.	Sometimes I can't feel anything at all— painful or good feelings.
Sexual Abuse	Get "out of" my body.	I have a hard time staying in the present. I go off in my mind and miss what's happening around me.
	Learn to use my sexuality to try to control what will happen with others.	I flirt a lot and try to get others to have sex with me. I use sex to get friends or approval. At times, people this to take advantage of me.
	Learn to use sexual feelings or sex to make myself feel better.	I touch myself sexually a lot, even when I'm not in private. Or I have sex with a lot of people. People use this to take advantage me. I have caught diseases because of it.
	Learn to use affection or physical contact to comfort myself and try to get people to love and care for me.	I hug people I've just met. When I make a new friend, I want to touch and hug and tell them I love them a lot. Sometimes people start to avoid me or complain, and I get in trouble with adults for having "bad boundaries."
	Keep my distance from others to avoid getting intimate or sexual.	I avoid relationships with others that may lead to anything sexual so that I won't be taken advantage of again. I feel lonely a lot.
Neglect	Get whatever I can when it is available and hold on to it.	I get in trouble because I steal, sometimes even when I don't need or want to.
	Take care of myself and don't rely on others to meet my needs.	I have a very hard time asking for help or accepting help.
	Develop ways to keep myself from feeling lonely, like watching a lot of TV, reading, playing video games. Do things by myself a lot.	I have a hard time making friends or relating to people. People sometimes think I'm "weird" or "different."
	Develop "imaginary friends" to comfort me when I'm hurt or upset.	I sometimes have trouble separating my "imaginary" world from the "real" world.
	Eat as much as possible.	I eat too much or when I'm not hungry.

Difficult situation	What I may do to get through it or cope	How it can cause problems for me
Emotional Abuse	Hide my needs and feelings from others. Make myself "invisible."	I don't tell others how I feel or what I need. Sometimes I don't know myself or don't have words to describe my feelings.
	Learn to be tough. Don't let anything get to me, but if it does, keep it to myself.	I have a hard time trusting people. I'm alone in this world and can only count on me.
	Work really hard to please and take care of other people, instead of myself.	Others take advantage of me, and I feel like I don't matter.
	Pay close attention to what upsets others and try hard not to upset them.	I believe I'll never be good enough. I try too hard. Other people use me.
	Give up and stop trying to be good. I try to become the person I've been told I am.	I do things that I know are wrong and get myself into trouble a lot.
Lots of Different Kinds of Trauma	Use drugs or alcohol to not feel or to feel better.	I sometimes do things that I later regret, or I don't do things I'm supposed to do.
	Take on the responsibility to care for or protect a parent, a sibling, or a friend.	I try to keep people safe but cannot. I try to help and care for people but end up failing and letting them down. I get blamed when things go wrong. I am attacked and pushed away when I try to keep the people I care about from making bad choices.
	Engage in extreme risk-taking to feel alive, in control, tempt fate, or take charge of "what's inevitably going to happen anyway."	I injure myself. I experience a temporary high or rush, then I crash, experience a huge letdown, and get really depressed and hopeless. This leads me to seek out the next, bigger risk.
	Hurt myself.	I damage my body to punish myself, to show others my pain, to make myself feel better, or to distract myself from emotional pain.
	Hurt others.	I ruin relationships because I'm afraid to get close to someone and risk getting hurt. I hurt others to deliver justice, to make me feel less helpless, to show them how it feels.

*These are examples of what some youth do and some of the reasons they say that they do them. For you, the reasons might be different or you might have other ways of dealing with bad things that happen. Or you might see yourself in some of these examples even if your situation is different. While these coping strategies can cause problems, they show up in many youth who have lived through Complex Trauma, and they were often part of what helped someone to survive trauma.

Activity 2: My Personal Coping Strategies

Use this worksheet to explore the things you did to cope with trauma or other difficult situations, and the ways these types of coping strategies helped you and/or caused you problems.

My Trauma or Difficult Situation	What I may do to get through it or cope	How this way of coping helped me AND/OR caused me problems

Part IV. Making Things Better

As mentioned before, trauma reminders or "triggers" can set off false alarms in the brain and body. For people who have experienced Complex Trauma, it can feel as if their problems are too big to manage, that they are all alone, that no one cares, or that nothing will help. When this happens, their false alarm can feel so strong that they forget safe or healthy ways to cope and turn to forms of coping that can cause more problems.

It is natural to be temporarily thrown off course when bad stuff from your past gets stirred up by reminders. This doesn't mean you're bad or crazy or messed up. It means you're human. The good news is that when humans make it through hard times, they become stronger.

Another piece of good news is that you don't have to go through the hard times alone. Everyone needs help from others at least some of the time, Complex Trauma or not. It's okay to get help from professionals and caring adults who understand how Complex Trauma works and can teach you ways to make things better. You also can learn from other youth who have gone through similar experiences and from people who can help you recognize and tap into your strengths and resilience.

Complex Trauma Therapies

Several treatments have been created specifically for children and adolescents who have experienced Complex Trauma. Some involve a counselor meeting with the whole family, some involve meeting with you more one-on-one, and others work with youth in groups. Some are mostly for teens and young adults, some mostly for younger children and their parents, and others are for youth of all ages. Research shows that these interventions help improve emotional difficulties that come from living through Complex Trauma. (For more information on these, see Part V).

Along with therapy, here are other ways youth can make things better:

1. Increasing Safety

Being "safe" means having enough protection so that—for the most part—there is no immediate physical danger around. Being "safe" also includes emotional safety: that the people around you won't say mean things to you or do things that make you feel bad about yourself. You can learn strategies to help you feel physically and emotionally safer. The important thing is to know is that things can be better. It might take a while, but it IS possible to feel safe enough so that you can focus on living your life the way that you want.

Things that could help:

There are ways to increase safety in your life and in your relationships. You may have experienced Complex Trauma for so long that you feel like it will never change. By talking to people you trust—maybe a teacher, therapist, coach, mentor, religious leader, relative, peer mentor, or good friend—you can learn ways to feel safe/be safe:

- Learn how to recognize unsafe situations. Identify and practice "exit" strategies—ways to leave these situations safely.
- Learn whom you can trust. Decide who will give you the best guidance if you are in an unsafe situation (at home, with friends, in your neighborhood, or school) and need to reach out for help. No one has to figure this out alone.
- Take a close look at all of your relationships. How do you know if someone is safe? Keep in mind that violence and abuse is not always physical—if someone repeatedly hurts you emotionally, you are in an unsafe relationship.

- Explore how you can feel safe in your own mind and body. What helps you to replace frightening or negative thoughts? When you are feeling unsafe, what helps you calm your body and feel more in control? Work with people you trust to learn when your body or mind tells you to get out of a situation, stand up for yourself, or get help.

2. Managing Feelings

Complex Trauma can lead to confusing emotions and feelings in your body. No one wants to feel numb, checked-out, scared, sad, hurt, angry, or tense all the time. Learning to safely and effectively manage your emotions, your energy level, and your behavior, gives you choices and more control over your life.

Things that could help:

- Learn to recognize your trauma reminders, your personal "triggers." Sometimes we get really upset over things that seem small to other people. Sometimes we don't even know *why* we're so upset and people think we're "overreacting." When that happens, it usually means we've been reminded of something that happened in the past. Learn to know the things that remind/trigger you (for example, the way a grown-up talks to you or the way another youth looks at you).
- Identify your feelings. Figure out what you're feeling *and* where you're feeling it. For example, when you're mad, does your heart beat really fast? When you're nervous, do you feel it in your stomach? Your body often sends you messages about how you're feeling. By tuning into your "body messages," you can identify and then change the feelings you're having in your body so that you don't always have feel so tense, nervous, or "amped up."
- Practice communicating your feelings to a caring friend or trusted adult in a way that they can "hear" you and want to help you. When you are hurt, avoid holding everything in or attacking or blaming a person you care about. Let people know what reminded/triggered your response so that they understand why you're so upset.
- Find ways to "let go" of hurtful feelings or thoughts, or to express feelings in ways that provide relief. Try journaling, drawing, listening to music, slow breathing, yoga, or exercise.
- Try out new coping skills to see which ones help. Which ones work best for which feelings? Which ones work best when you have lots of energy? When you have low energy? When you are thinking really negatively about yourself? When you are feeling spacey or fuzzy?

3. Building Healthy Relationships

Everyone needs people in their lives. Complex Trauma often means that the people who were supposed to have your back, didn't. Sometimes it means that adults close to you did not take care of you, protect you, or help you in tough times. That can make it hard to trust other people. While it is healthy to be careful about those you choose to trust, when people have been hurt, betrayed, or let down by others, they start believing there is no one who can be trusted. When that happens, it's easy to give up and expect the worst from everyone. You might even start to put up with things that you shouldn't. Sometimes, if you've gone through a lot of hard things, you might start to treat people the way you've been treated in the past.

Things that could help:

Relationships with siblings, peers, and adults take work. Some people prefer to have just one or two good friends; other people like to be surrounded by lots of people. It is important to find people who care about you, whom you can go to for support, whom you have fun with and feel safe with, and people who have your back when times are hard. The skills you need to build good relationships are (1) learning how to make and keep safe/healthy connections, (2) knowing what you want from other people, and (3) understanding what you want and can give to other people:

- Take a close look at all of your relationships. What have you liked—and not liked—in each of them? Questions to ask yourself? Is this a relationship I can count on? How do I act when I'm in this relationship? Am I proud of the person I am?
- Decide which relationships are worth keeping, and which ones might be causing problems or hurting you. Look for examples of good relationships in people you know or from ones described in books, TV, and movies, and try to picture what a "healthy" relationship would look like and feel like.
- What kind of people do you have in your life now? People can play many different roles in your life: friend, mentor, caregiver, to name a few. What do you need more of?
- Do you have enough sources of support? For instance, do you have someone you can count on for comfort? For advice? For fun, when you want to hang out? Someone who is a good listener when you have problems? Someone who can give you a hand or lend you things? You don't need one person to give you all types of support. You may find that it takes several people to meet your different needs.
- Practice your relationship skills with people you already count on. That might be your therapist or school counselor. When you are ready, try practicing these skills with at least two people whom you would like to know better that you hadn't thought of before, such as other people your age, cousins, adults in your family, other adults whom you trust.
- Think about building new friendships and relationships. For instance, identify something you like to do that other people might like and find out if they want to do it with you. Look for opportunities to try out new activities or go to new places that seem fun and safe and introduce yourself to new people. It takes a lot of courage, but you can do it. If you're unsure about a new person or group of people, ask an adult you trust to think it through with you.

4. Increasing Strengths and Positive Feelings

Many youth who have experienced Complex Trauma spend much of their time just getting by from day-to-day. This is exhausting and often means having more bad feelings than good ones. Good feelings—pride, excitement, curiosity, and hope—won't erase the hard times, but can help you get through them. Everyone deserves some joy in their life. Look for people and places in your community to do fun things. Learn to recognize positives about yourself and the people and things around you.

Things that could help:

- Take a look at what is getting in your way now. Sometimes there are things outside of us that get in the way—things like family obligations or not enough money. Sometimes things inside us get in the way—feeling guilty or uncomfortable with happy feelings, feeling that you don't deserve good things, or that things are hopeless.

- Find things you're good at, and do them. Take pride in your efforts. Feel good about working toward something. Maybe you're interested in sports? Dancing? Music? Drawing? Writing stories, lyrics, or poems? Singing? Being a good listener? Helping others? Taking care of animals? Cooking? Gardening? Building or fixing things?
- Learn how to do one thing at a time. Choose one thing to do, and focus all of your attention on it. Do it for two minutes. Don't do anything else and don't think about anything else. To start, you might try concentrating on slowing your breathing and breathing from your stomach. If you find your mind wandering, don't feel bad—just try again. The more you practice, the better you'll get. The more you practice doing one thing at a time, the easier it will be for you to stop worrying about bad things and start focusing on good things.
- Make a list of all the things you like to do and all the things you'd like to try. Make it as long as you can. Choose things that seem impossible and far off and things that are available right now.

5. Making Sense of the Past, Figuring Out Who You Are Now, and Taking a Lead Role in Shaping Your Future

When people live through a lot of bad stuff and not enough good stuff, they learn to react first, think later, and focus on survival. Over time, this can become a habit and feel like the only way to live. People can forget all about their wishes, goals, and dreams. Young people who have experienced Complex Trauma may not get a chance to develop goals; often, the only future they can imagine is more of the same bad stuff or no future at all. They can, however, learn to envision a better future, to feel more powerful, to think through difficult situations, and to make good decisions that solve problems and improve their lives.

Things that could help:

- Learn to understand and cope with your emotions. Don't just get rid of your feelings, but take control over them. You want to be able to size up a situation, future out your choices, and make a good decision—instead of making things worse by acting on impulse. Every situation you face, even one that seems impossible, actually presents several solutions, including the choice to do nothing or walk away. It can be hard to know which choice is the right one. While it takes courage to ask for help, you may feel much better after seeking guidance from adults or friends who have earned your trust.
- Explore who you are, what matters to you, and what you want to be in the future. Examine your interests (what you do well, what makes you happy), your opinions, and discover what holds meaning for you. Try to understand what experiences in your life, good and bad, have influenced the person you have become so far. The more you know about yourself and why you do and feel the things you do, the more power you have to change things in your life.
- Make a list of your goals and work with adults you trust to map out "steps" to work toward them. Identifying your goals can help you make decisions that are right for you.
- Explore your experiences with someone you trust at a pace that feels right for you. You might identify something that frightens or upsets you and figure out why your reactions probably make sense—or made sense given your history—even if they get in your way. Learning to manage your responses to reminders of things in the past takes time and usually requires support from someone who helps you feel safe.

- Even the hardest times can lead to development of new strengths (resilience) in people who survive those times. Take an inventory of the strengths you already have developed.
- Exploring your experiences, paying attention to your life story, and looking at the whole you—not just the parts that feel bad, hurt, or messed up—can help build the strongest you.
- Remember, others can help spark strength in you and help give you tools to cope—but it is up to you to take it from there.
- Never give up on imagining a brighter future for yourself, even when everything seems impossible and you have to fight through hopeless feelings. You can't change everything, but you can find good things that make living your life worth it.

You can develop the power to make a difference in your own life. When you do, you will make things better for yourself and the important people in your life.

Activity 3: Making Things Better

Use this worksheet to explore actions you can take to help recover from trauma and thrive.

Areas of Focus	Personal Triggers or Vulnerabilities	Things I Can Do to Make Things Better Get Help & Support, Take Action, Rest & Regroup, or Make a Change!	Things I would Like Adults to Do to Help Make Things Better
Increasing Safety			
Managing Feelings			
Building Healthy Relationships			
Increasing Stengths & Positive Feelings			
Making Sense of the Past			
Building a Strong Identity			
Planning a Brighter Future			

Part V. For More Information

You can find lots of information about Complex Trauma on the website of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network: http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/complex-trauma.

For additional information about the long-term consequences of childhood trauma occurring within families, read the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) studies conducted by the CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html

Information about specific types of therapy for Complex Trauma is included on the NCTSN web page (http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers/treatments-that-work). Fact sheets describing many different types of therapies are also available (http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/treatments-that-work/promising-practices).

Some of the Complex Trauma therapies to look into and ask more about include:

For children, adolescents, and young adults:

- ARC: Attachment, Regulation & Competency
- TST: Trauma Systems Therapy

For adolescents and young adults:

- ITCT-A: Integrated Treatment of Complex Trauma for Adolescents
- SPARCS: Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress
- TARGET-A: Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy—Adolescent

For children and their parents or caregivers:

- ITCT-C: Integrated Treatment of Complex Trauma for Children
- RHL: Real Life Heroes

For the entire family:

- SFCR: Strengthening Family Coping Resources

While not specifically designed for complex trauma, TF-CBT (Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and CPP (Child-Parent Psychotherapy) have also been utilized effectively to reduce PTSD and related difficulties in select samples and treatment settings for children and adolescents impacted by complex trauma. Please consult with a certified trainer for guidance on how to adapt TF-CBT or CPP for complexly traumatized populations.