

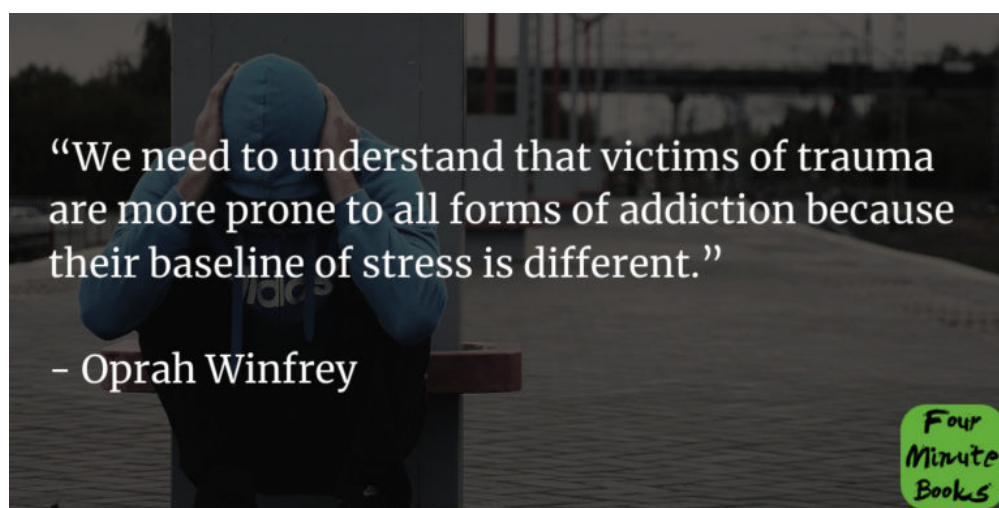
What Happened To You Summary

 fourminutebooks.com

1-Sentence-Summary: *What Happened To You* is Oprah's look into trauma, including how traumatic experiences affect our brains throughout our lives, what they mean about the way we handle stress, and why we need to see it as both a problem with our society and our brains if we want to get through it.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Have you ever wondered why you react in a certain way to some situations? Or why you can't kick a bad habit? It's all too easy to blame ourselves for our shortcomings and compulsions. But sometimes, our trauma is to blame for our inexplicable reactions and unhealthy habits.

So instead of asking ourselves, "What's wrong with me?" we should shift the question to "What happened to me?" Trauma is difficult to address, and sometimes we don't even realize the profound effect it can have on us even in our adult life. Experiencing abuse or neglect as a child can change how we respond to stress and how we see the world.

In *What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing* by Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey, we explore powerful scientific and emotional insights into the way so many of us behave the way we do. As a survivor of neglect and abuse as a child, Oprah has joined forces with Dr. Perry to advocate for trauma survivors. Together, they teach how those who experience trauma can address it head-on and find healing.

Here are 3 of the most insightful lessons about trauma from this book:

1. What we experience during childhood has a profound effect on our brain as an adult.
2. We can learn positive regulation strategies later in life to help us deal with trauma.

3. It is possible to overcome trauma with the right support.

Let's get right into these lessons and learn from Oprah!

Lesson 1: Our brains are uniquely shaped by the experiences that we have during childhood.

Early on in Oprah's life, she remembers feeling intensely lonely. She knew that she wasn't wanted. Her mom was only a teenager when she had her, and she didn't have the resources to care for her adequately. Most of her childhood was spent with various family members, many of whom neglected and beat Oprah regularly.

These early experiences shaped how she saw the world as well as herself because experiences like this literally change the brain.

A baby's brain develops at a rate of 20,000 new neurons per second. Every single experience a child has is logged in a personal "codebook" in the brain. Later on, these experiences can manifest themselves but cannot be understood in a rational way.

An example of this is a child the author's called Sam. Sam was physically abused by his father and was removed by Child Protective Services. Once Sam moved into a group home and received the support he needed, he was doing well and progressing.

However, once he got a new teacher, he started acting out at school. Everyone was puzzled as to why until Dr. Perry met Sam's father. He wore a strong Old Spice cologne, the very same scent Sam's teacher wore. Suddenly it clicked—the aroma of the cologne was triggering old, terrifying memories for Sam. Once the teacher changed the cologne, the behavior stopped.

If we want to understand trauma, we need to ask: What happened to you, specifically when you were very young? Deciphering your own personal codebook will help you understand the defense strategies you may have developed to keep yourself safe.

Lesson 2: Learning regulation strategies can help you heal from trauma.

Early in her career as a journalist, Oprah often worked 100-hour weeks and was always stressed and exhausted. She ignored all of the signals her body sent to tell her something was wrong. This is because the abuse in her past had trained her to be a people-pleaser. This meant ignoring her own boundaries and working to meet everyone else's needs instead. She turned to food for comfort.

When we're stressed, it means something is out of balance. However, many people who have endured trauma are trained to ignore the signals. This is why it becomes important to learn positive regulation strategies when things get stressful.

Everyone's brain has a self-regulation system of core regulatory networks, or CRNs for short. Their purpose is to keep us balanced. When a caregiver responds consistently to a baby's needs, his CRNs become resilient, and a child becomes able to regulate himself as he becomes older.

But if the caregivers are neglectful or abusive, the child's CRNs become impaired, also known as dysregulated. **This makes the child's stress responses become sensitized, meaning he will always be looking out for threats and will panic easily.** Neglectful caregivers make a child associate people with disappointment, meaning they struggle to build and maintain human connections.

This often means that the child will have a hard time finding positive ways to regulate himself. So they are more vulnerable to addiction, whether it be drugs, alcohol, self-harm, or eating disorders. These can serve as a temporary relief from distress. This relief lights up the reward circuit in the brain, and soon they want to repeat the behavior more and more.

The way to stop this is by learning to identify the stress signals in your body. For Oprah, this meant creating healthy boundaries and learning to be okay with saying no. She says that even if you didn't grow up and develop positive regulation strategies, you can learn them later in life and regain balance.

Lesson 3: With the right support, we can overcome the traumatic experiences of our past.

Did you know that almost half of all children living in the US have had some sort of serious traumatic experience in their life? For adults, 60 percent report experiencing at least one traumatic incident.

We know how these affect the brain, but now imagine the effect these experiences have on our larger communities when so many of us have had trauma. So many of us are living with sensitized stress responses. Is it really any wonder we see people act out in violence or intolerance? Should we be surprised when adults are unable to teach their children how to regulate themselves?

People like to think that kids are resilient and can recover from trauma and abuse, but this simply isn't the case. They are still affected by trauma, even if you can't see it. This type of stress can mean they might have trouble focusing, or their health might deteriorate.

What these kids need is support. Not just immediately after the trauma but even into their adulthood. They need support from professionals who understand a traumatized brain. **But perhaps most important of all is that they need support from the communities around them.**

All of us need support from the people around us to heal. Schools, workplaces, schools, and even places of worship need to support the people around us who have survived trauma. Our communities need to be more informed about trauma so we can be more understanding. With the right support, we can learn how to begin to heal and help others through our experiences.

What Happened To You Review

Oprah never disappoints. She's inspiring and motivational because she's so vulnerable with her own experiences, but she's also really smart. I highly recommend you check out *What Happened To You!*

Who would I recommend the What Happened To You summary to?

The 38-year-old who has experienced great trauma throughout their lives, the 64-year-old who wants to help their children get through their mental health struggles, and anyone that wants to learn how to get through the difficulties of life.