



TRAUMA & IDENTITY

How has trauma affected your identity?

How Trauma Affects Identity

- **Our identity is learned and shaped through experiences and interactions**
 - Trauma can interrupt learning who we are as we grow up
 - Trauma can also lead to feeling lost or disconnected from who we were before the trauma occurred
- **Trauma can keep the “spotlight” on only certain memories, emotions, or parts of our history**
 - We can inadvertently define ourselves by our trauma memories, emotions, or histories
- **Trauma can thus keep us from noticing the fullness of our broader experience**

My _____ Self

- What does your mind have to say about each of these labels?
 - Give ~1min to each of these 4 “selves”. Write down your thoughts about each.
 - My relationship self
 - My PTSD self
 - My “year ago” self
 - My home self

The trauma “spotlight”: How can this cause problems?



- We can become stuck in sense of our identity that is **RIGID**, hurtful, undeserved, limiting, and keeps us stuck
- If we take the trauma identity as true...
 - We can view ourselves and our daily experiences “through the clouds and fog of trauma”
 - We can ignore, distrust, or avoid alternative evidence in our lives that we’re more than just our trauma
 - We may feel stuck with giving in or overcompensating if we buy in to what trauma is selling us about ourselves

The Observer Self

- The aspect of us that is aware of whatever we're thinking, feeling, sensing, or doing in any moment.
- Seeing ourselves more **FLEXIBLY** and realistically
 - As able to change over time (& still changing)
 - Learning new ways to define and thinking about "Who am I?"
- Opening us up to new possibilities of how to act and live our lives to be able to move more towards our values
 - Reducing behaviors that pull us away from our values and keep us stuck in PTSD
 - Staying in the present and tuned into what matters to us (helping numbness, dissociation)

Additional Ways to Practice “Observer Self”

- Meditation (e.g., recall past moments across time to tap into the “Continuous You”)
- Opposite Action to take power back from “I AM” trauma labels
 - “I am a burden” → act the opposite by going out with friends
 - “I am hopeless” → act the opposite by going to therapy anyway
- Self-Reminders
 - Thoughts, feelings, and experiences **do not equal** all of who we are
 - Shift from “I am broken” → “Awful things happened to me, and I am more than just those awful things”
- Any time you practice “catching” judgments about yourself, pausing, and reflecting on how to respond effectively and rooted in your values