



Healing Developmental Trauma: How Early Trauma Affects Self-Regulation, Self-Image, and the Capacity for Relationship

Laurence Heller, Aline LaPierre

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Written for those working to heal developmental trauma and seeking new tools for self-awareness and growth, this book focuses on conflicts surrounding the capacity for connection. Explaining that an impaired capacity for connection to self and to others and the ensuing diminished aliveness are the hidden dimensions that underlie most psychological and many physiological problems, clinicians Laurence Heller and Aline LaPierre introduce the NeuroAffective Relational Model® (NARM), a unified approach to developmental, attachment, and shock trauma that, while not ignoring a person's past, emphasizes working in the present moment. NARM is a somatically based psychotherapy that helps bring into awareness the parts of self that are disorganized and dysfunctional without making the regressed, dysfunctional elements the primary theme of the therapy. It emphasizes a person's strengths, capacities, resources, and resiliency and is a powerful tool for working with both nervous system regulation and distortions of identity such as low self-esteem, shame, and chronic self-judgment.

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Sarah says

If I were just reviewing the second half of this book I would give it four stars. The clinical vignettes, interventions, and approach to psychotherapy are illuminating, exciting, and immediately applicable. The focus on the body, integrating experience, and facilitating self-regulation are excellent clinical interventions that are described systematically and coherently. I am considering the multi-year training course because I can easily see how these methods could be of valuable use in clinical practice.

The first half of the book however, is mostly devoted to a theory development that is completely without evidence. The five critical opportunities for developmental trauma are interesting (though less interesting than the enneagram), but as far as I can tell, completely without empirical substantiation or cross-cultural analysis. I find it personally irritating when psychologists misrepresent theory for fact or fail to acknowledge that they are describing theoretical causes for symptoms in a particular sociohistorical context so, minus two stars.

Sharon says

Perhaps this is really a 4-star book but when compared to Bessel van der Kolk's "The Body Keeps the Score", this book felt like a distant second place. The 5 subtypes of developmental trauma in the beginning of the book were interesting but overly-generalized without enough room to contain variants and amalgamations which clearly exist. Only 1 of the 5 subtypes was explored in depth, the "Connection" subtype, which was a big disappointment. Based on the level of self-promotion and trademarked terms repeated throughout, I wonder if this is an intro to 4 future books for the other subtypes. I won't be reading them. The second half of the book does deliver concrete guidance to heal or assist in healing, but overall, the science felt sparse and the NARM(tm) infomercial slant of the book turned me off. I remain partial to team van der Kolk.

Chandra says

Trauma comes in many forms. The form that most people know is shock trauma from individual events. For example, nearly choking to death via umbilical cord in birth. You can't even have a memory of that, but it can still cause post-traumatic symptoms throughout life. A more common, but less known, form is developmental trauma, which is a prolonged or repetitive exposure to threatening events as a young one. For example, prolonged neglect or isolation can produce a post-traumatic stress disorder.

Trauma is seen as a psychological issue. However, it is stored in our bodies. Traumatic experiences dysregulate our nervous systems and can ratchet up our parasympathetic responses, leading to symptoms of ADD, depression, bipolar, borderline, etc etc. Developmental trauma is often underdiagnosed or diagnosed wrongly as a more common mental illness.

This book is a phenomenal exposition on how developmental trauma can disrupt our basic needs for connection, attunement, trust, autonomy, and love. It provides practical methods for discharging toxic traumatic energy and regulating your nervous system. I would recommend this book to a sizeable majority of my friends, and especially to anyone who's a practitioner in social work and counseling.

Claire says

Draws together all major lines of theory, research - accurately so IMO.

Their approach views developmental trauma as leading to five main adaptive/organizing styles, depending on age when trauma began relating to connection, attunement, trust, autonomy, and love-sexuality. Most of the book addresses how to deal with connection difficulties, but arguably all are intertwined.

A couple of chapters give case studies of how therapy may proceed from this model. It is a somatic approach - and is similar, if not indistinguishable to many forms of therapies such as Hakomi, somatic experiencing etc., at which point the particular model and theory cease to have importance in my view.

For the amount of information that's in there, it's an easily understandable read. I felt the authors' presence and humaneness when reading, definitely not always the case. They appear to have an deep understanding of the intricate difficulties those with developmental trauma experience - there were some insights I had not thought of before; it makes for a full read.

And whilst clinical examples are given, arguably, we've all suffered less than perfect i.e. "good enough" parenting, thus there are aspects anyone will be able to identify with and find use of in here.

Will definitely return to this for bites of information and the like.

Michelle says

This book really illuminates the trauma experienced in childhood when primary caregivers are unable to provide healthy attachment experiences with their children either because they suffer from addiction, mental illness, or have not worked through their own attachment trauma. Heller really puts some amazing pieces together to form a whole picture of how adaptations to early attachment trauma create patterns of behavior that carry into adulthood. The science behind the physiological responses to trauma is increasingly becoming a part of informed treatment in working with clients healing from all types of trauma and is so important in overcoming barriers (often mislabeled as resistance) and avoiding re-traumatizing clients in the therapeutic setting.

My only complaint about this book is some of the repetition of main ideas, but maybe they are so important they bear repeating.

Liz says

I'm not a therapist, so I cannot evaluate this book for its clinical use, but as a lay person I found the

explanation of the NARM (neuroaffective relational model) therapeutic approach accessible. Heller thoroughly describes the physiological responses to trauma at an early age, how the body locks in the memory of trauma, and what kinds of therapy help unlock and process each traumatic manifestation.

Elizabeth says

This book is a blueprint into our subconsciousness. It explains why all of us at times act in a very irrational way, why we can't quite control it, why we deny that fact and why we can also be resistant to seeking out or receiving the help we need.

The authors present the subject matter in a very non-judgmental and non pathological way; they use cause and effect approach. They also don't just present a problem, they present a healing approach that is holistic as it draws upon many different psychological treatment approaches.

The book is written in a more scientific language, but things are laid out in concise digestible blocks. I would say it's a must read for everyone, as none of us really escape developmental trauma or some mis-attunement in our childhood and it has profound effects on us as adults. This book gave me not just a great insight into myself, but also in those around me.

Lexy says

Whilst this book contained some very interesting information, some chapters were really difficult to get through, especially in terms of repetition and writing style.

Maria Menozzi says

Far from a dry read of psychological theory, this book gives a concise, non-pathologizing process for healing developmental trauma, e.g. childhood abuse. This process, known as NARM, the Neuro Affective Relational Model, focuses on how trauma affects our ability to have safe, productive, constructive relational experiences with self and others and the dire effects that has on our ability to function daily and find meaning and purpose in life. There are five "survival styles" depicted and delineated in this book and traits, coping styles, coping strategies and therapeutic interventions for each style. The book also takes the reader through a number of therapeutic sessions with those who have these difficulties and how a NARM therapist works with the client to achieve recovery. The book also gives the reader a foundation for understanding how developmental trauma affects the brain and central nervous system. I have read other authors on the physiological aspects of trauma before but never was able to fully understand the scope of the damage. This book does a superb job of depicting how NARM works to help recover, the triggers for each survival style and how the body/brain works to keep us safe/surviving through the experiences with easy to follow tables and pictorial charts and graphs. I highly recommend this book for anyone who is trying to make sense of their own struggle with trauma and for any health professional who needs education and information to recognize and utilize tools to help those in their care. If only this was taught in every university and required for every medical and health professional, we would find more competent healing for those in this very serious distress.

Candace Wegner says

A bit difficult to get into but well worth the read. Excellent reference for those who work with hurting people.

Christine Fay says

Overall, this book is written in accessible scientific language. It was very enlightening for me to understand myself as well as others, and that we are all somewhat damaged (whether it be intentionally or unintentionally) by our families of origin.

"As a result of the earliest trauma, individuals with the Connection Survival Style have disconnected from their bodies, from themselves, and from relationship. Connection types have two seemingly different coping styles or subtypes: the thinking and the spiritualizing subtypes. To manage the pain of early trauma, some individuals disconnect from their bodies and live in their minds. They value thinking and logic over feelings and emotions. Other individuals, having never embodied, manage their disconnection by spiritualizing their experience. These individuals tend to live in the energetic field, in more ethereal realms. Individuals of both subtypes are disconnected from their bodies and when asked what they are feeling in their body, find the question challenging, anxiety producing, and often impossible to answer" (37).

Michael says

Lawrence Heller and Aline Lapierre deliver a brilliant synthesis of developmental psychology, psychoanalytic theory and the work of Peter Levine (Somatic Experienceing). Heller and Lapierre bring together "top down" and "bottom up" approaches to understanding and intervening in with challenges of developmental trauma and nervous system disregulation which are critical in understanding emotional wellbeing.

This book extremely well written and easy to digest despite the complexity that is addressed here. Reading it is an absolute joy and filled with key insights. There are many helpful graphics and case examples.

Nothing short of revolutionary!

Sergey Bir says

the most important book i've read

Steve Woods says

A really useful book for anyone dealing with the effects of childhood trauma, or even the consequences of later "shock" trauma. With a small grounding in these techniques some decades ago, I have by instinct worked out ways to process much of the traumatic experiences that have been so much part of my life, both childhood abuse and combat related ptsd. This book just formalized my own approach and provided reinforcement of my internal sense of conviction that this is the way forward and of my sense of trust in the process. It has been so validating to see my own experience recounted by someone with a professional background and understanding.

In my experience what is pointed to in this book as an approach to the resolution of trauma is the only comprehensive way forward. It's a must for clinicians and if they haven't read it and understood its message their effectiveness in helping those who have so suffered is highly suspect.

Heiki Eesmaa says

A superb synthesis of body-centered approaches, bonding theory, neuroscience, trauma theory and ... more. It feels fresh, wise, and original. Great case examples, including commented session scripts. Very interesting work with gaze is described.
