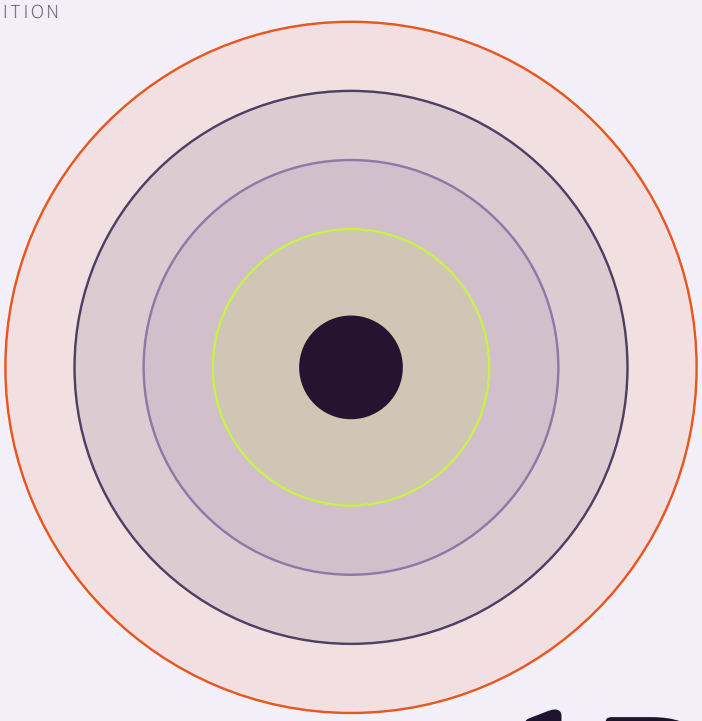


Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror

A reading of the book by Judith Lewis Herman (1992)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Judith Lewis Herman is a psychiatrist who taught at Harvard Medical School and spent decades working with survivors of violence. In this book she brings together experiences that had been studied apart: combat veterans, survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, and political prisoners. She argues that their responses share a common pattern, and proposes a new diagnosis, complex post-traumatic stress disorder, for people harmed repeatedly over long periods. The second half sets out recovery in three stages: establishing safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. Throughout, she holds that recovery happens in relationship, and that bystanders are asked to take a side. The book draws on clinical work, survivors' accounts and the history of how trauma has been noticed and then forgotten.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Trauma cuts people off, so recovery has to happen in relationship, not alone.

Herman names disempowerment and disconnection as the core of the injury, so recovery rests on regaining power and building new connections. A good therapist or group can help a great deal. But the survivor stays in charge of her own recovery; no one can heal on someone else's behalf.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Recovery comes in stages, and the first stage is always safety.

Herman describes three stages: establishing safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. Going over the past before a person is safe and steady can make things worse, not better. The stages are not a straight line, and people often return to earlier ones as life changes.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Safety starts with the body and works outward.

In her account the first tasks are basic ones: sleep, food, movement and care for yourself. From there safety extends to your surroundings, such as a safe place to live, enough money and people you can rely on. It is slow, practical work, and it matters more than any insight.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Long, repeated harm can change a person in ways a single event does not.

Herman proposed the term complex post-traumatic stress disorder for people who lived through long periods of captivity or control, in situations they could not easily leave. She argued that the standard diagnosis, built around single events, missed the changes she saw in these survivors' sense of self and in their relationships.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A soldier home from war and a woman leaving a violent home can carry the same kind of wound.

The book's boldest move is to put combat veterans, survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, and political prisoners in one frame. Herman shows how much their responses have in common. In doing so she ties private suffering to public life.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Societies keep forgetting trauma, and it takes a movement to bring it back into view.

Herman traces three times the study of trauma came to light: hysteria in the late nineteenth century, the trauma of combat after the world wars and Vietnam, and sexual and domestic violence with the women's movement. Each time, attention faded when the movement behind it lost strength.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A bystander cannot stay neutral: looking away helps the person who did the harm.

Herman points out that the person who did harm asks bystanders only to do nothing, while the person harmed asks them to share the weight of what happened. Bearing witness is uncomfortable, which is why it is so often avoided. For someone recovering, being believed matters.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Grieving what was lost is part of recovery, not a detour from it.

The second stage, remembrance and mourning, is about putting the story into words in a safe setting and grieving what was lost. Herman is clear that this happens with support, at the survivor's own pace, and only once safety is in place.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Recovery ends in an ordinary life, shared with other people.

The third stage, reconnection, turns toward the future: new relationships, new routines and a sense of self that is not defined by what happened. Herman also describes the value of groups, where survivors find that they are not alone.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Find a trained therapist
- [ ] Write your safety plan
- [ ] Save your support numbers
- [ ] Choose one daily anchor
- [ ] Make one corner feel safe

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Check in with your body each evening
- ◯ Practise one grounding step
- ◯ Keep one regular contact

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Find a trained therapist

Look for a licensed therapist with training in trauma.

On a first call, ask how they approach pacing and safety. You are allowed to keep looking until the fit feels right.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Write your safety plan

Use the plan on this page to list the people, places, routines and grounding steps that help you feel steady.

Keep one copy on paper and one on your phone.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Save your support numbers

Today, put your local emergency number, a crisis line for your country and two trusted people in your phone's favourites.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Choose one daily anchor

Pick one routine you can keep most days, such as a set wake time, a short walk or a regular meal.

Make it small enough that a hard day can still manage it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Make one corner feel safe

Choose a chair, a room or a corner and make it calm: a blanket, a soft lamp, something with a texture you like.

Go there when you need to settle.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Check in with your body each evening

Ask three questions: did I sleep, did I eat, did I move?

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Practise one grounding step

On a calm day, practise a short grounding step: name five things you can see, press your feet into the floor, or breathe out slowly.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Keep one regular contact

Message or meet one trusted person on the same day each week.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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December 2026

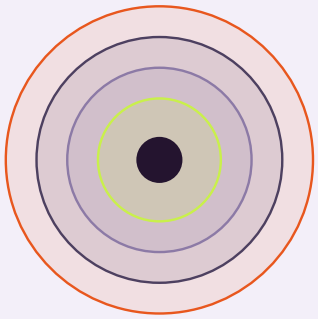
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28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Safety first, then the story, then a life shared with others. No one has to do it alone.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER JUDITH LEWIS HERMAN

Read it online, and vote on the takeaways:
hourlife.com/books/trauma-and-recovery

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