

WHAT IS **DOUBLE ABUSE** + HOW TO PREVENT IT.

We at The MEND Project have found that what is true and extremely damaging for most victims of Primary Abuse (adult, adolescent, or child physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, workplace abuse, any form of domestic violence, sex trafficking, bullying) is the Double Abuse, cultural or group, which victims too often receive when reaching out for help. Here are some examples:

1

Persons of authority who have no idea how to handle trauma or abuse. For instance, forcing a rape victim to explain, usually more than once, why she walked somewhere alone or went on a date with the perpetrator, as though she deserved the crime against her. She begins to doubt herself and her experience.

2

Therapists who misdirect, downplay, breach protocol or do not disclose they are outside their scope of training. Or, if a therapist does not stand with the surviving client entrusted in his or her care in matters of abuse, the survivor is re-victimized, re-traumatized and further abused by someone they trust.

3

Uninformed spiritual leaders with judgmental, narrow, or patriarchal prejudices. When a woman reached out for help from her church or Bible study and is not believed, or she is instructed to “stick it out,” “be better,” or simply “submit,” she is being pressed down, diminished and made small by the very circle that is called to help lift her up, empower, build, heal and restore her.

In any of these examples, whether intentional or unintentional, the harm it causes the victim is impossible to overemphasize.

Yet, the most impactful form of Double Abuse occurs when uneducated and ill-informed family and friends ignore the voice of the victim, instead of defining the situation by their own wrong ideas, perspectives or biases. Many times, this leads the family and friends to impose harsh expectations of how the victim should react and respond, even giving them further consequences if they don't comply.

COMPLEX PTSD

Double Abuse is responsible for escalating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder into Complex PTSD, a much more difficult and serious form of trauma to heal. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is the result of either an acute event or cumulative trauma, usually via troubled relationships, which does not get processed or resolved (G. Erwin, 2000). Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Complex PTSD) is defined as ongoing psychological stress injury, which results from repeated trauma over which the victim has little or no control, and from which there is no real or perceived hope of escape (see www.outofthestorm.website).

Author and psychotherapist, Belleruth Naparstek, found in her research of over 70 studies on trauma that individuals who escaped suffering from PTSD were those who were believed, supported, respected, and even exalted for their sacrifice and experience. According to Naparstek, one thing is certain: victims and survivors of trauma deserve the utmost respect.

If this is true, what happens when the opposite takes place? **The cost to the victim is added cruelty.**

Trauma sets in motion serious emotional and physiological reactions that can themselves be debilitating or terrorizing. This means trauma goes on to negatively affect a person's physical health and psychological wellbeing. There is a biochemical and involuntary muscular skeletal chain of events that can result in an unusual number of medical problems. Belleruth Naparstek explains it this way: "PTSD presents some sort of

conflated disturbance in the regulation of our neurobiological [the mind], endocrinological [hormonal, developmental, sleep, mood, sexual function, growth, metabolism, and tissue function] and immunological systems" (Invisible Heroes: Survivors of Trauma and How They Heal).

We also love this quote from Judith Herman's renowned work on trauma;

“ Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group recreates a sense belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bear witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (Herman, Trauma and Recovery, p 214)

HOW TO HELP PREVENT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PTSD INTO CPTSD

We must all take note of the harm we might do to another if we don't slow down enough to be present and show compassion to those experiencing trauma. The response to abuse and the victim from the community can truly be like Kintsugi's golden repair. There is life-giving power in connection with others that serves the healing process in essential ways. When coming alongside a victim of abuse you may be able to prevent their development of PTSD in to CPTSD by making a pivotal mark in the trauma victim's life. Early in a victim's process, after they've experienced trauma, there is a pathway to hope where you can shift their mindset from

despair and self-blame to grace and restoration. The victim is never the one on which to cast blame, whatever your opinion, perspective, or worldview may be. They have chosen to come to you for support, empathy, and consideration. Listen to them. Set yourself and your experience, upbringing, or predisposed biases aside, and be with them in their pain. Remind them that this was not their fault.

Will you be another push to the ground? Or will you offer a gentle hand, reaching out to help them stand up again?

OUR HEALING MODEL OF COMPASSION

Below you will find our approach of handling trauma. The harmful response paralyzes progress and escalates trauma and the healing model supports healing.

