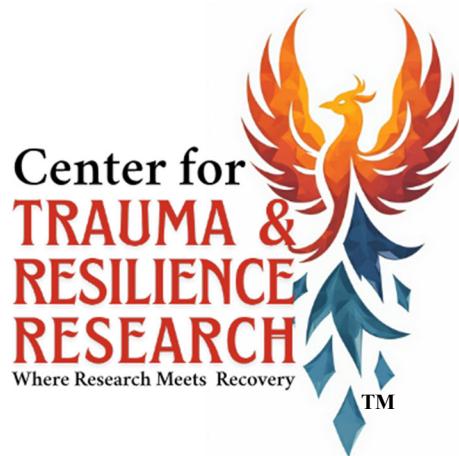


Finding Peace from Trauma

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Abstract

Trauma disrupts the conditions that make peace possible by altering threat appraisal, narrowing attention, dysregulating autonomic states, and compromising trust in self, others, and the world. This essay synthesizes interdisciplinary scholarship to conceptualize “finding peace from trauma” as a multidimensional recovery process involving embodied safety, emotion regulation capacity, relational openness, cultural meaning, and existential integration. Drawing on emotion regulation theory, the paper describes how trauma-related hyperarousal, avoidance, and negative cognitions can constrain access to low-arousal positive affect and peace of mind (Gross, 1998; McManus et al., 2024). Physiological perspectives emphasize that felt safety and flexible autonomic regulation support social engagement and stress recovery, creating a somatic foundation for peace (Gilbert et al., 2008; Porges, 2006; Thayer & Lane, 2000). Mindfulness-based mechanisms and embodied mindfulness frameworks are reviewed as pathways that may reshape appraisal, attention, and interoceptive access, strengthening emotion regulation and increasing inner peace (Guendelman et al., 2017; Hölzel et al., 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Khoury et al., 2017). Beyond intrapersonal processes, peace after trauma is shaped by relational climates and social sharing of emotion, which influence trust, security, and the plausibility of repair (De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Rimé, 2007). Finally, the essay considers cultural, gendered, and institutional discourses that determine which trauma narratives and healing practices are legitimized, and how wellness cultures may individualize distress in ways that obscure structural harm (Agius, 2024; Nisbet, 2019; Zembylas, 2015). Implications are offered for trauma-informed practice, peace education, and meaning-centered care, including measurement of peace of mind and spiritual peace as outcomes of recovery (Kreitzer et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013; Sleight et al., 2021).

Keywords: trauma; peace; peace of mind; felt safety; emotion regulation; embodiment; mindfulness; relational repair; meaning-making; spirituality

Finding Peace from Trauma

Trauma and the Loss of Peace: Threat, Constriction, and Disconnection

Trauma is not only an event but a psychophysiological and relational disruption that changes how safety is perceived and how emotion is regulated. After trauma, threat appraisal is often intensified, attention narrows toward danger cues, and the body may remain in states of hyperarousal or shutdown that are incompatible with calm, openness, and trust. In emotion science terms, trauma can bias the generation and regulation of emotion such that high-arousal negative states become more accessible, while low-arousal positive affect (e.g., calm contentment) becomes harder to access (Gross, 1998; McManus et al., 2024). The experience of “peace” therefore becomes less a matter of willpower and more a question of regulatory capacity and environmental conditions that permit downshifting out of defensive mobilization.

From a trauma-informed perspective, the loss of peace also involves disconnection—disconnection from the body, from others, and from coherent meaning. Diminished access to internal states can appear in clinical presentations where individuals struggle to identify or trust bodily signals, which can perpetuate anxiety, compulsive coping, and reduced self-attunement (Liberman et al., 2023). Finding peace from trauma thus requires re-establishing access to internal cues, rebuilding trust in the body as a safe place to live, and restoring flexibility in emotional responding.

Felt Safety as a Foundation: Autonomic Regulation and Adaptive Affect Systems

A central pathway toward peace from trauma is the cultivation of felt safety. Felt safety is not identical to objective safety; it is an embodied appraisal that the present moment is sufficiently secure to allow rest, connection, and meaning-making. The affect regulation system associated with feeling safe and content has been linked to lower distress and reduced self-

criticism, suggesting that safety-related affect is a meaningful clinical target (Gilbert et al., 2008). Physiological models further argue that social engagement and relational openness depend on autonomic flexibility, such that the capacity to regulate arousal supports both interpersonal connection and psychological resilience (Porges, 2006; Thayer & Lane, 2000).

These perspectives suggest that trauma recovery is inseparable from nervous system functioning. When the body remains in chronic threat activation, relational repair may be cognitively desired yet emotionally implausible. In this sense, finding peace is an embodied competence that emerges when physiological regulation enables a broader range of affect and behavior, including curiosity, compassion, and perspective-taking (Porges, 2006; Thayer & Lane, 2000).

Emotion Regulation as a Clinical Bridge to Peace

Emotion regulation theory provides a useful lens for understanding why peace can be difficult after trauma: emotion generation processes become biased toward danger, and regulation attempts may rely on avoidance, suppression, or rigid control, which can reduce long-term flexibility (Gross, 1998). Contemporary work on individual differences in peace of mind suggests that peace is not merely the absence of distress, but an adaptive emotional style linked to regulation and appraisal patterns (Sikka et al., 2023). Related research also suggests that gratitude and positive reappraisal can support peace of mind and psychological well-being, indicating that cognitive-emotional processes can be cultivated in ways that support peace without denying pain (Du & Liu, 2025).

Importantly, peace after trauma is not best conceptualized as permanent calmness. Rather, peace may involve increased capacity to move through activation and return to regulation—an expanded window of tolerance in which threat responses no longer dominate the internal

landscape. Low-arousal positive affect is particularly relevant here: calm, steadiness, and contentment can function as distinct protective emotional resources, yet they are often overlooked relative to high-arousal positive states (McManus et al., 2024). Trauma-informed interventions that emphasize downregulation, grounding, and acceptance may therefore restore access to these quieter forms of wellbeing.

Mindfulness, Compassion, and Embodied Practice Pathways

Mindfulness-based approaches are frequently discussed in contemporary trauma and wellbeing literature because they target attention, appraisal, and bodily awareness—processes central to emotion regulation. Theorized mechanisms include increased attentional control, decentering from distressing thoughts, improved interoceptive awareness, and altered emotional reactivity, which together may support greater stability and peace (Hölzel et al., 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Tang et al., 2015). Reviews of mindfulness and emotion regulation likewise suggest that mindfulness practice can influence neurobiological and psychological processes relevant to regulation (Guendelman et al., 2017). Embodied mindfulness frameworks emphasize that practice is not primarily cognitive but enacted through posture, breath, movement, and an ethic of awareness that supports safety and compassion (Grossman, 2015; Khoury et al., 2017; Khoury et al., 2025).

Applied studies provide additional support for mindfulness-related pathways to inner peace and regulation. For example, a randomized trial with migrant children found that mindfulness training improved mindfulness, inner peace, emotion regulation, and reduced mind wandering, suggesting potential developmental and contextual relevance (Gong et al., 2025). Other work indicates that brief compassion-oriented practices can soften negative evaluations of disliked others, pointing to possible relevance for relational peace and repair (Schroter & Jansen,

2022). Within trauma recovery, these approaches are often most effective when implemented with careful attention to pacing, choice, and safety, given that interoceptive attention may initially activate traumatic memory networks rather than soothe them.

Relational Repair and Emotional Climate: Peace as Co-Regulated Safety

Trauma frequently occurs within relationships or social systems, and recovery often requires relational repair and community-level supports. Research on emotional climate and cultures of peace suggests that collective affective patterns influence human security and trust, shaping whether individuals feel safe enough to engage in relationships and institutions (De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Basabe & Valencia, 2007). The social sharing of emotion further links private experiences to group meaning-making: when emotions are shared, validated, and integrated, they can foster cohesion and reduce isolation; when they are denied or politicized, they can intensify mistrust and fragmentation (Rimé, 2007).

In contexts of collective trauma or conflict, emotional barriers can inhibit peace even when peace is verbally endorsed. Threat, fear, and identity dynamics can sustain defensive attitudes and resistance to reconciliation, making emotion regulation and narrative repair essential components of social healing (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). Work on victims' narratives suggests that storytelling can shift attitudes and emotional responses in ways that support coexistence, highlighting that relational peace is partly constructed through shared meaning (Castro-Abril et al., 2025). For trauma survivors, these findings support a broader clinical implication: peace is rarely achieved alone. It is co-created in relational contexts that provide safety, acknowledgment, and consistent repair.

Meaning, Spiritual Peace, and Existential Integration

For many individuals, finding peace from trauma involves existential reorganization—integrating suffering into a coherent narrative and reconnecting with meaning, values, and spiritual resources. The literature on trauma and transformation emphasizes growth and reorientation as possible outcomes of suffering, though not as a demand placed on survivors (Tedeschi, 1995). In healthcare and survivorship contexts, spiritual peace and meaning can buffer anxiety and support physical and emotional wellbeing (Sleight et al., 2021). Measurement tools such as the Brief Serenity Scale and conceptual work on peace of mind also suggest that peace can be operationalized and assessed as an outcome in clinical and spiritual care settings (Kreitzer et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013). Additionally, studies of unmet spiritual care needs indicate that relational and spiritual support can materially affect emotional and spiritual wellbeing, suggesting that peace is a socially supported, not purely intrapsychic, achievement (Pearce et al., 2012; Steinhauser et al., 2017).

However, contemporary peace-seeking is shaped by social legitimacy: whose trauma stories are heard, what forms of spiritual practice are considered credible, and which emotional responses are sanctioned. Gendered discourses about neutrality and the emotional politics of security can delegitimize certain peace-oriented stances and emotional expressions (Agius, 2024). Meanwhile, wellness culture can individualize distress and sell peace as a consumer product, sometimes obscuring structural determinants of suffering and safety (Nisbet, 2019; Andrade, 2020). Trauma-informed peace must therefore be both compassionate and critical—supporting individual healing while also addressing the social conditions that perpetuate threat.

Implications for Trauma-Informed Practice

Across the reviewed scholarship, several clinical implications emerge. First, peace is best treated as a multidimensional outcome: felt safety, emotional steadiness, relational openness, and meaning-centered integration may represent different but related pathways to “peace after trauma” (Gilbert et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2013; Porges, 2006). Second, trauma recovery should target embodied regulation and interoceptive access through approaches that are paced, choice-based, and relationally supportive (Guendelman et al., 2017; Khoury et al., 2017). Third, peace is shaped by emotional climate—family, community, institutional, and cultural contexts that either support or undermine trust and security (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007). Finally, culturally responsive care must recognize that peace is culturally patterned, influenced by ideal affect and local meaning systems; clinicians should avoid imposing a single emotional ideal (Tsai, 2007; Misra & Misra, 2024).

Conclusion

Finding peace from trauma is neither simple positivity nor the erasure of painful memory. It is a recovery process that restores embodied safety, strengthens emotion regulation, supports relational repair, and re-establishes coherent meaning. Contemporary scholarship suggests that peace is anchored in felt safety and autonomic flexibility (Gilbert et al., 2008; Porges, 2006), shaped by emotion regulation skills and appraisal patterns (Gross, 1998; Sikka et al., 2023), and cultivated through embodied practices such as mindfulness and compassion (Hölzel et al., 2011; Khoury et al., 2017). Peace is also social: emotional climates and the sharing of emotion influence whether trust and security become plausible again (De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Rimé, 2007). Ultimately, trauma-informed pathways to peace require both individual practices and relational-cultural conditions that make safety, dignity, and repair possible.

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