

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR HISTORY

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page features a large yellow circle overlapping a teal circle. The overlapping area is filled with a pattern of small white dots. A light brown wavy line extends from the left side of the page across the middle, ending near the yellow circle.

## CULTIVATING COHERENCE

There is power in being able to tell your story, putting unspeakable events into words in one of the most essential components of healing from trauma. Coherence is an important aspect of discovering your own personal narrative. Coherence can be defined as having a story that makes sense. This does not mean that you feel okay about what happened to you. Rather, coherence involves having an understanding about your past and how it informs who you are today. Let's look at what facilitates coherence:

- Mindful reflection on your life, including traumatic losses
- Awareness of how your unique life experiences have made you who you are
- Development of an inclusive narrative or life story that organizes your self-understanding, accommodates new information, and supports your ongoing growth

The following questions will help you explore your childhood history as a foundation for developing a coherent narrative. These questions will help you identify traumatic childhood events, reflect on the nature of your relationships with family members and caregivers, specific events of abuse or neglect, as well as positive resilience factors. Be mindful that you might experience uncomfortable emotions or feelings.

**WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF YOUR  
RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MOTHER  
WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?**

**WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF YOUR  
RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER  
WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?**

**WERE THERE ANY OTHER PARENT FIGURES (E.G. STEPARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, CAREGIVERS) THAT TOOK CARE OF YOU WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD? IF SO, DESCRIBE THOSE RELATIONSHIPS.**

**DID YOU HAVE ANY SIBLINGS? IF SO, DESCRIBE THOSE RELATIONSHIPS.**

**HOW DID YOUR PRIMARY CAREGIVERS RESPOND TO YOU WHEN YOU WERE UPSET (SAD, ANGRY, HURT, OR AFRAID)?**

**HOW DID YOUR PARENTS DISCIPLINE OR NOT DISCIPLINE YOU AS A CHILD?**

**DO YOU KNOW OF EARLY  
SEPARATIONS FROM YOUR PARENTS?  
DO YOU RECALL EXPERIENCING  
PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL NEGLECT?**

**DO YOU RECALL EXPERIENCE THAT  
WERE ABUSIVE (VERBALLY,  
PHYSICALLY, OR SEXUALLY)?**

WHAT WAS THE RELATIONSHIP LIKE BETWEEN YOUR PARENTS? DO YOU RECALL EPISODES OF ANGER OR VIOLENCE? DID THEY GET DIVORCED?

WERE ANY OF YOUR CAREGIVERS LIVING WITH AN UNTREATED MENTAL ILLNESS? IF YES WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE ON YOU?

**WERE ANY OF YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS  
ADDICTED TO ALCOHOL OR DRUGS? IF  
YES, HOW DID THIS AFFECT YOU?**

**DID ANY OF YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS  
SPEND TIME IN JAIL OR PRISON? IF  
YES, WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE ON  
YOU?**

**WERE THERE ANY POSITIVE MENTORS WHO WERE INVESTED IN YOU, CARED FOR YOU, UNDERSTOOD YOU, OR PROTECTED YOU DURING YOUR CHILDHOOD? WAS THERE SOMEONE WHO NOTICED THAT YOU WERE CAPABLE, INTELLIGENT, OR TALENTED?**



DO YOU RECALL HAVING A  
COMMUNITY MEMBER (SUCH AS A  
NEIGHBOR, CHURCH MEMBER, TEACH,  
OR COACH) WHO WAS THERE TO HELP  
YOU? DO YOU RECALL HAVING  
SOMEONE WHO CARED HOW YOU  
WERE DOING AT HOME OR IN SCHOOL?

**DID YOU DEVELOP ANY FRIENDSHIPS  
IN WHICH YOU COULD TALK ABOUT  
YOUR LIFE AND FEEL UNDERSTOOD?**

**DID YOU DEVELOP STREETS SMARTS:  
WERE YOU INDEPENDENT, OR A GO-  
GETTER?**

**NOW, TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTIONS. CAN YOU IDENTIFY TRAUMATIC EVENTS THAT MIGHT EXIST AS TRIGGER IN YOUR CURRENT LIFE?**