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## Understanding Trauma-Related Beliefs

How Trauma Can Shape the Way We Think About Ourselves, Others, and the World

Trauma doesn't only affect memories and emotions—it can also shape the beliefs and interpretations we develop about ourselves and our lives. These beliefs often form as a way to survive or stay safe, even when they are no longer helpful. These are called maladaptive trauma-related beliefs.

### What Are Trauma-Related Beliefs?

Trauma-related beliefs are deeply held thoughts or assumptions that develop after overwhelming or painful experiences. They often feel like absolute truths, even when they are shaped by fear, shame, or past danger rather than present reality.

These beliefs are understandable responses to trauma—not personal failures.

### Common Trauma-Related Beliefs

#### Beliefs About Yourself

- “Something is wrong with me.”
- “I am weak, broken, or damaged.”
- “It was my fault.”
- “I should have handled it better.”
- “I don’t deserve good things.”
- “My feelings are too much.”

#### Beliefs About Others

- “People can’t be trusted.”
- “If I depend on someone, I’ll be hurt.”
- “People will leave once they really know me.”
- “I have to protect myself at all times.”

#### Beliefs About the World

- “The world is unsafe.”
- “Bad things will always happen.”
- “I can never let my guard down.”
- “I am never truly safe.”

#### Beliefs About Control and Power

- “I have no control.”
- “I am powerless.”
- “My choices don’t matter.”
- “Nothing I do will change things.”

## **Why Do These Beliefs Develop?**

Trauma teaches the brain to prioritize survival. The nervous system may remain on high alert, and the mind tries to make sense of what happened. At one time, these beliefs may have helped you stay safe or cope, but over time they can increase fear, shame, and emotional distress.

## **How Trauma-Related Beliefs Affect Daily Life**

These beliefs can influence emotions, behaviors, relationships, self-esteem, and stress responses such as fight, flight, freeze, or fawn.

## **An Important Reminder**

Having trauma-related beliefs does NOT mean you are weak, broken, or failing at therapy. These beliefs can change with support, safety, and time.

## **Healing Trauma-Related Beliefs**

In therapy, we work to gently identify these beliefs, understand where they came from, separate past danger from present safety, and build more balanced, compassionate ways of thinking.

## **Reflection (Optional)**

Notice thoughts that sound like:

- “I always...”
- “I never...”
- “I have to...”
- “I can’t...”

These can be signs of trauma-related beliefs. You do not need to explore them alone.

## **You Are Not Your Trauma**

Beliefs shaped by trauma can change. Healing does not erase the past—it helps you live more fully in the present.