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## **What Not to Say to a Trauma Survivor From a Trauma Survivor's Perspective**

### **"What happened?"**

Let trauma survivors tell you the events in their own time and share the details they are comfortable with. Asking questions, especially immediately, often serves other's curiosity rather than the survivor's recovery. They do not owe anyone their story.

**Alternative phrase: How are you?**

### **"Weren't you the one that \_\_\_ happened to?"**

Using someone's trauma as an introduction is inappropriate. If a survivor has not directly shared with you their information about their trauma, allow them to bring it up conversationally in their own time.

**Alternative phrase: How are you?**

### **"Everything happens for a reason."**

This is an empty phrase that does not offer support or constructive help. There is no reason for a trauma to occur. No one should have to experience a traumatic event.

**Alternative phrase: I am so sorry you went through that.**

### **"Is this triggering?"**

The word "trigger" in itself can be emotionally taxing. Asking a survivor at any moment if something is triggering may spark negative emotions they had forgotten in that moment.

**Alternative phrase: Is this OK for you? Do you need support?**



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**“Wow, that’s [Insert mental health diagnosis (example: survivors guilt, PTSD)]”**

Only the survivors mental health professionals are able to appropriately diagnose a survivor. Providing opinions on a survivors circumstance or mental health is counterproductive and highlights something they may already know and are struggling with.

**Alternative phrase: How can I help and support you?**

**“That totally gives me PTSD/ Flashbacks.”**

Using real mental health diagnoses and trauma symptoms casually to emphasize a common inconvenience or feeling is harmful to those who actually experience them. These phrases trivialize the severity of the diagnosis and actual symptoms, making it less believable when a survivor tries to explain what it is actually like to live with it.

**Alternative phrase: I really [insert static verb (ex: hate, love, care for)] \_\_\_\_\_.**

**"Why are you letting it have power over you?"**

This phrase is blaming the victim for not just “getting over it”, rather than holding the perpetrator accountable. Trauma recovery is not linear and cannot just be forgotten. It takes time and effort to begin to heal from trauma.

**Alternative phrase: I support you and we will get through it together**



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### **“You are so strong for having dealt with that”**

Survivors are strong before their trauma, not because of it. Some survivors do not feel strong and are still building their resilience or are simply trying to live day-to-day. There is no timeline for trauma recovery and everyone’s definition of strength is different.

**Alternative phrase: I really appreciate you trust me/Sharing with me/etc.**

### **Shutting down the survivor’s conversation about the trauma to transition to a different topic.**

While the conversation about trauma is never comfortable, if the survivor is ready to discuss it, having a support system willing to listen is vital. If you do not have the Capacity Or you are a trauma survivor that may have difficulty hearing their story, be upfront that you care, but cannot process the information at this time. Having a toolkit of resources available to share with a survivor is a helpful way to navigate your response in this scenario.

**Alternative phrases: I am here to support you and there are some further resources that may be able to help. I do not have the capacity to help, but these resources may be able to.**

Find resources at: [www.reclaimfoundation.org/resources](http://www.reclaimfoundation.org/resources)