

SPRING 2026

Wellness Guide

BY HEALTH FOR ALL



STRESS, SURVIVAL & WHOLE-PERSON HEALTH

The impact of chronic stress

SIGNS OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IN ADULTS

How childhood trauma affects us in adulthood

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

How to make it stop

CORTISOL BELLY

What causes it and how to manage it

WHY YOU'RE NOT LOSING WEIGHT

Lifestyle factors that get in the way

WHY CAN'T YOU SLEEP?

Understanding why you can't sleep is the first step toward improving it.

RESOURCES TO REDUCE STRESS

Helpful tips for reducing stress



ABOUT THE HFA WELLNESS GUIDE

We care about your health and wellness

This publication is intended for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have questions about your health, please consult a qualified healthcare professional.

If you are experiencing a medical emergency or are in immediate danger, call 911.

Crisis Hotlines

- 24/7 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Crisis Hotline – MHMRABV – [\(888\) 522-8262](tel:(888)522-8262)
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline – Call or text [9-8-8](tel:988)
- Texas 211 – [2-1-1](tel:211) option 8
- National Human Trafficking Hotline – [\(888\) 373-7888](tel:(888)373-7888)
- Veterans Crisis Line – [9-8-8](tel:988), option 1
- Sexual Assault Resource Hotline – [\(979\) 731-1000](tel:(979)731-1000)

RESOURCES

For more resources, please visit the HFA website at www.hlth4all.org

If you are experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, grief, relationship challenges, or other emotional concerns, Health for All Behavioral Health Services are available. We encourage you to call and schedule an appointment to learn more about the support and resources available to you. **Clinic: 979-774-4176**



Signs of Childhood Trauma in Adults

HOW CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IMPACTS ADULTHOOD

Childhood trauma does not always stay in childhood. For many adults, painful experiences from early life continue to affect emotions, relationships, physical health, self-esteem, and the ability to feel safe in the world. Trauma can result from abuse, neglect, abandonment, domestic violence, bullying, emotional invalidation, parental substance abuse, or growing up in an unpredictable or unsafe environment.

Many adults who experienced trauma as children do not immediately recognize the connection between their past experiences and their current struggles. Instead, they may describe feeling “stuck,” anxious, emotionally numb, overly reactive, or constantly exhausted without fully understanding why.

Understanding the signs of unresolved childhood trauma can help individuals begin the process of healing and self-awareness.

What Is Childhood Trauma?

Childhood trauma occurs when a child experiences events that overwhelm their ability to cope emotionally or physically. Trauma is not only about what happened; it is also about how the nervous system responded and whether the child had safety, protection, and emotional support afterward.

Traumatic experiences may include:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Loss of a parent or caregiver
- Chronic criticism or rejection
- Living with addiction or mental illness in the home
- Foster care instability
- Community violence or poverty



Children often adapt to survive difficult environments. Those survival patterns may later appear as emotional or behavioral difficulties in adulthood.





Common Signs

1. Chronic Anxiety or Hypervigilance

Adults with childhood trauma often feel constantly “on edge.” Their nervous system may remain stuck in survival mode long after the danger has passed.

Signs may include:

- Difficulty relaxing
- Constant worry
- Startling easily
- Overthinking
- Feeling unsafe even in calm environments
- Trouble trusting others



Hypervigilance develops because the brain learned early that danger could appear unexpectedly.

3. Low Self-Esteem and Shame

Many trauma survivors carry deep feelings of shame or worthlessness. Children often blame themselves for abuse or neglect because it feels safer than believing caregivers were unsafe.

Adults may struggle with thoughts such as:

- “I’m not good enough.”
- “Something is wrong with me.”
- “I don’t deserve love.”
- “I always fail.”

Even highly successful adults may secretly feel inadequate or fear being exposed as flawed.

4. Problems with Relationships

Childhood trauma can strongly affect attachment and trust. Adults may:

- Fear abandonment
- Avoid emotional closeness
- Become overly dependent in relationships
- Struggle with boundaries
- Choose unhealthy or abusive partners
- Have difficulty trusting others

Some individuals alternate between craving connection and pushing people away.

5. People-Pleasing and Fear of Conflict

Children raised in unstable or abusive homes often learn to prioritize the emotions of others to stay safe. As adults, this may look like:

- Difficulty saying no
- Avoiding conflict at all costs
- Excessive apologizing
- Fear of disappointing others
- Neglecting personal needs

Many trauma survivors become highly attuned to the moods and reactions of those around them.



6. Dissociation or Emotional Numbing

Dissociation is a protective response in which the mind disconnects from overwhelming emotions or experiences.

Adults may experience:

- Feeling detached from themselves
- “Spacing out”
- Memory gaps
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Feeling unreal or disconnected from surroundings

Some people describe functioning on “autopilot” for years.

7. Perfectionism and Overachievement

For some survivors, achievement becomes a way to gain approval, avoid criticism, or create a sense of worth.

Signs include:

- Fear of failure
- Harsh self-criticism
- Workaholism
- Difficulty resting
- Feeling valuable only when productive

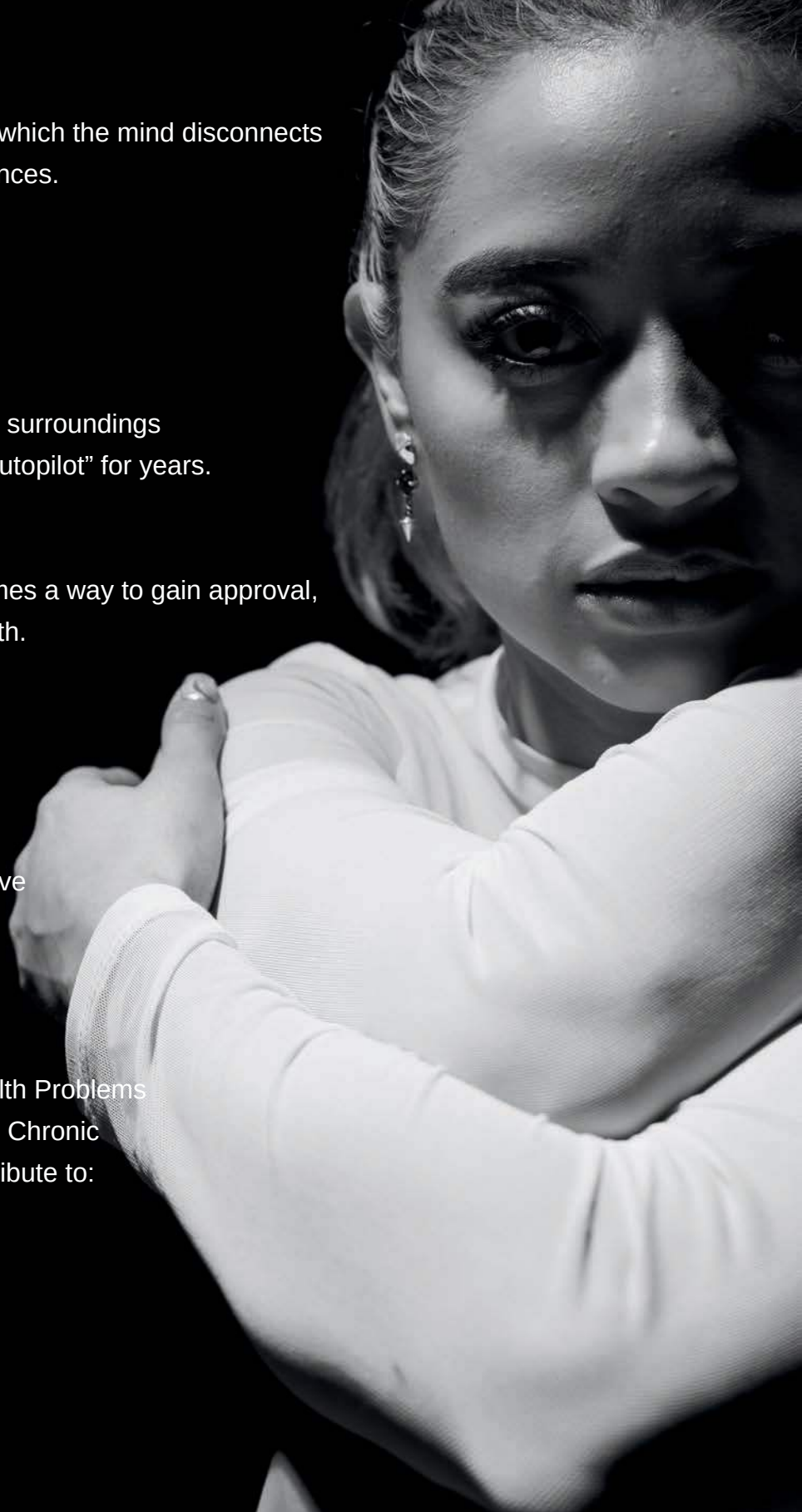
Underneath perfectionism is often fear, shame, or a need for control.

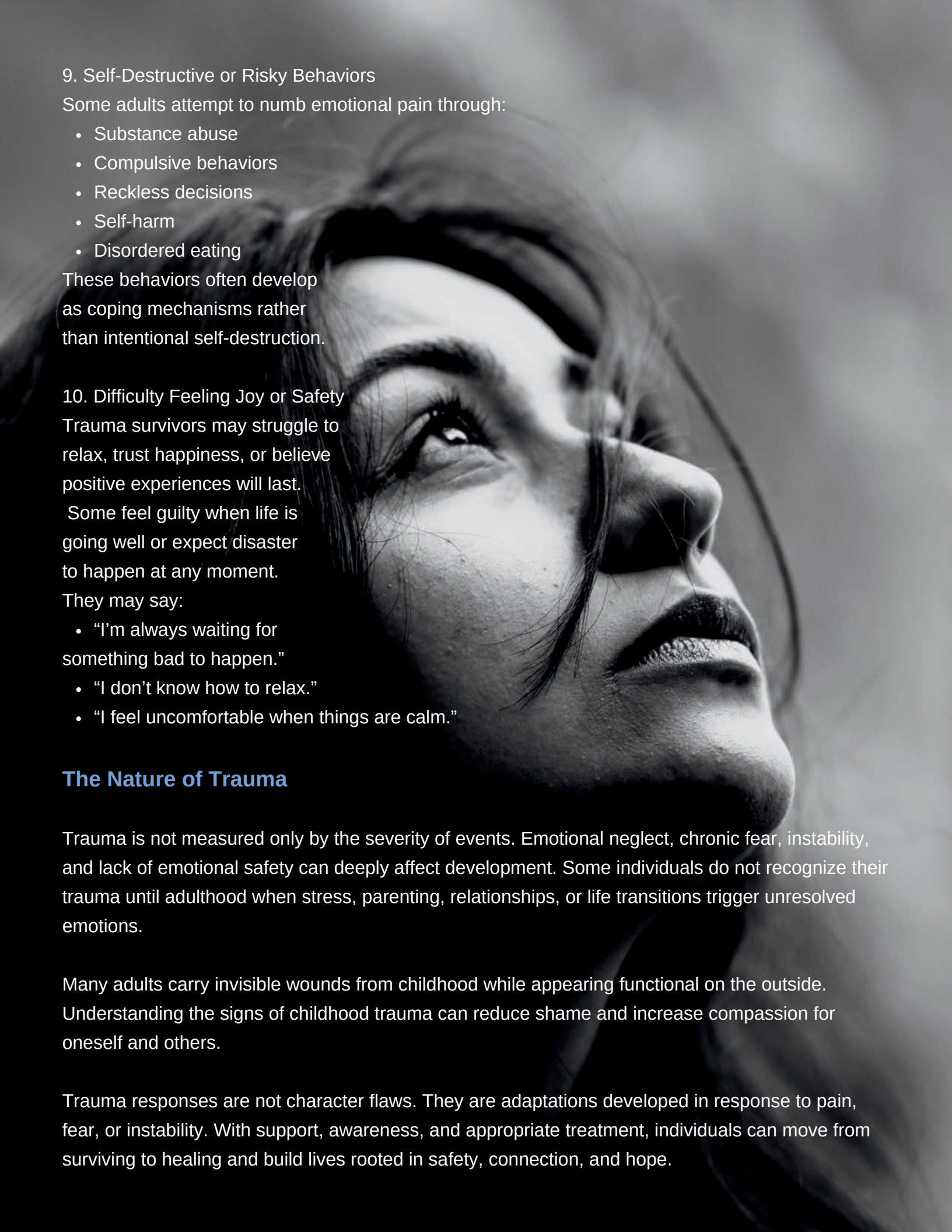
8. Physical Symptoms and Chronic Health Problems

Trauma affects both the mind and body. Chronic stress on the nervous system may contribute to:

- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Chronic pain
- Sleep disturbances
- Autoimmune issues

Research increasingly shows a strong connection between adverse childhood experiences and long-term health outcomes.





9. Self-Destructive or Risky Behaviors

Some adults attempt to numb emotional pain through:

- Substance abuse
- Compulsive behaviors
- Reckless decisions
- Self-harm
- Disordered eating

These behaviors often develop as coping mechanisms rather than intentional self-destruction.

10. Difficulty Feeling Joy or Safety

Trauma survivors may struggle to relax, trust happiness, or believe positive experiences will last.

Some feel guilty when life is going well or expect disaster to happen at any moment.

They may say:

- “I’m always waiting for something bad to happen.”
- “I don’t know how to relax.”
- “I feel uncomfortable when things are calm.”

The Nature of Trauma

Trauma is not measured only by the severity of events. Emotional neglect, chronic fear, instability, and lack of emotional safety can deeply affect development. Some individuals do not recognize their trauma until adulthood when stress, parenting, relationships, or life transitions trigger unresolved emotions.

Many adults carry invisible wounds from childhood while appearing functional on the outside. Understanding the signs of childhood trauma can reduce shame and increase compassion for oneself and others.

Trauma responses are not character flaws. They are adaptations developed in response to pain, fear, or instability. With support, awareness, and appropriate treatment, individuals can move from surviving to healing and build lives rooted in safety, connection, and hope.

Healing is Possible



The effects of childhood trauma are real, but healing is possible. The brain and nervous system can change through supportive relationships, therapy, and healthy coping strategies.

Helpful approaches may include:

- Trauma-informed psychotherapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Mindfulness and grounding skills
- Support groups
- Healthy boundaries
- Nervous system regulation techniques
- Self-compassion practices

Healing does not mean forgetting the past. It means learning that survival patterns developed for protection are no longer the only way to live.

How to Identify and Cope With Emotional Abuse — and Make It Stop



Emotional abuse is one of the most damaging forms of abuse because it often leaves no visible bruises while deeply affecting a person's confidence, emotional safety, identity, and mental health. Many individuals living in emotionally abusive relationships struggle to recognize what is happening because the abuse can be subtle, manipulative, inconsistent, or disguised as love, concern, or "normal conflict."

Over time, emotional abuse can leave a person feeling confused, anxious, isolated, emotionally exhausted, and trapped. The good news is that emotional abuse can be identified, addressed, and stopped through awareness, boundaries, support, and safety planning.

What Is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse involves patterns of behavior used to control, manipulate, intimidate, humiliate, isolate, or diminish another person emotionally or psychologically.

Unlike occasional arguments or disagreements, emotional abuse is repetitive and often rooted in power and control.

Emotional abuse can occur in:

- Romantic relationships
- Marriages
- Families
- Friendships
- Workplaces
- Religious or community settings



Common Signs of Emotional Abuse

1. Constant Criticism or Humiliation

The abusive person may:

- Put you down frequently
- Mock your appearance, intelligence, or abilities
- Embarrass you publicly
- Minimize your accomplishments
- Use sarcasm to hurt you

Over time, this can damage self-esteem and create self-doubt.

2. Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a manipulative tactic that causes a person to question their own reality, memory, or judgment.

Examples:

- “That never happened.”
- “You’re too sensitive.”
- “You’re crazy.”
- “You always overreact.”

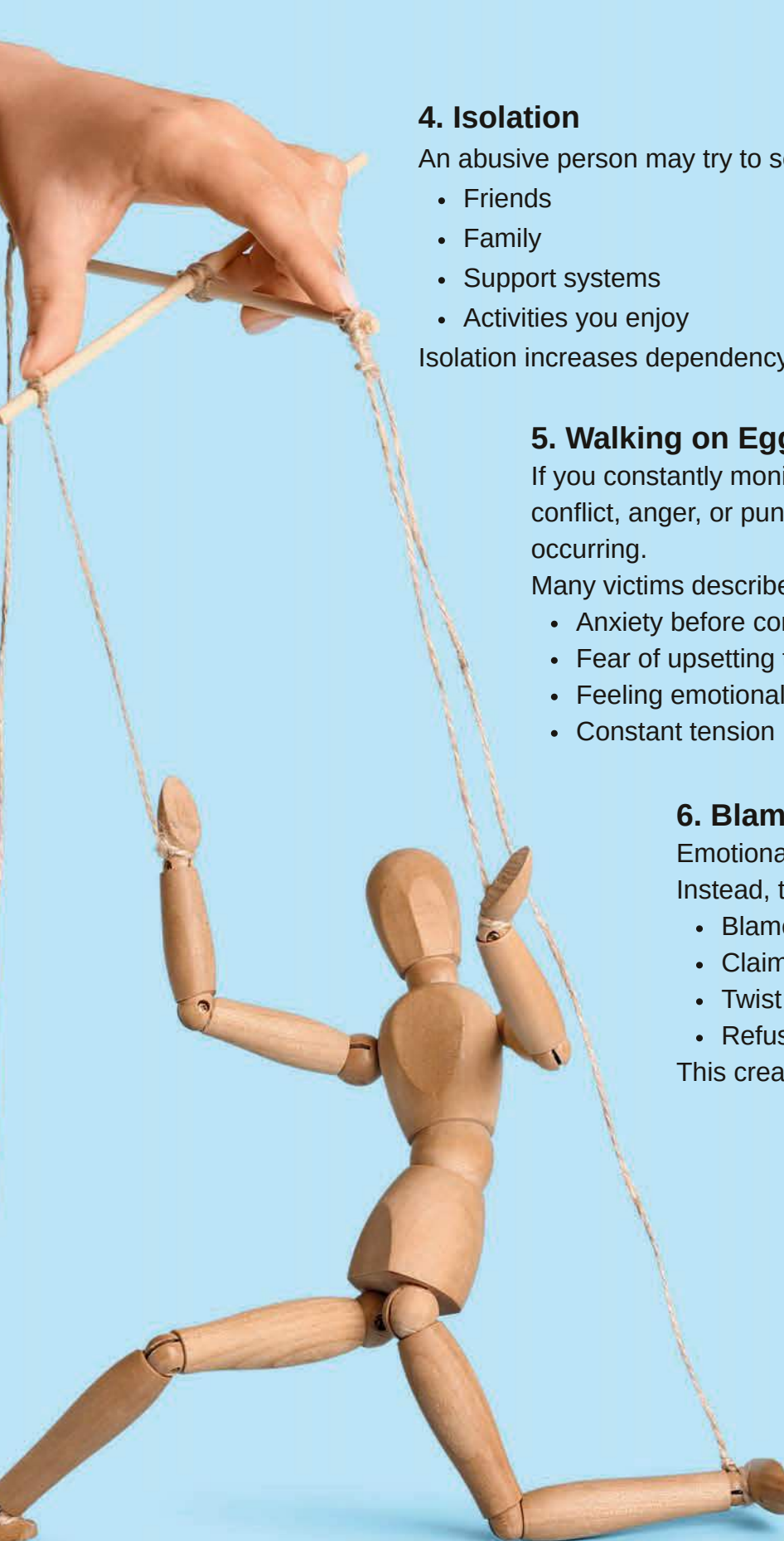
Victims often begin doubting themselves and relying more heavily on the abuser’s version of events.

3. Controlling Behavior

Emotional abusers often attempt to control:

- Who you spend time with
- Finances
- Communication
- Social media
- Transportation
- Work or education decisions

Control may be disguised as “protectiveness” or “love.”



4. Isolation

An abusive person may try to separate you from:

- Friends
- Family
- Support systems
- Activities you enjoy

Isolation increases dependency and makes it harder to seek help.

5. Walking on Eggshells

If you constantly monitor your words, tone, or behavior to avoid conflict, anger, or punishment, emotional abuse may be occurring.

Many victims describe:

- Anxiety before conversations
- Fear of upsetting the other person
- Feeling emotionally unsafe
- Constant tension

6. Blame-Shifting

Emotional abusers rarely accept responsibility. Instead, they may:

- Blame you for their anger
- Claim you “made them” act badly
- Twist situations to become the victim
- Refuse accountability

This creates confusion and chronic guilt.

7. Threats, Intimidation, or Silent Treatment

Emotional abuse can include:

- Threatening abandonment
- Threatening self-harm to manipulate
- Destroying property
- Intimidating body language
- Withholding affection
- Extended silent treatment

These behaviors create fear and instability.

Coping with Emotional Abuse



Coping with emotional abuse begins with recognizing and acknowledging that the behavior is unhealthy and harmful. Many people minimize emotional abuse because there are no physical injuries, yet the emotional and psychological effects can be profound. Once a person begins to identify the abuse clearly, it becomes important to stop internalizing the negative messages repeatedly communicated by the abusive individual. Emotional abusers often project blame, criticism, and shame onto others, causing victims to question their own worth, judgment, or reality. Learning to challenge those distorted beliefs and reminding oneself that the abuse is not deserved is a critical step toward healing.

Another important part of coping is reconnecting with supportive and emotionally safe people. Emotional abuse often thrives in isolation, so rebuilding healthy connections with trusted friends, family members, therapists, support groups, faith communities, or advocates can help restore perspective and emotional stability. Supportive relationships remind individuals that they are not alone and that healthy communication and respect are possible.

Coping with Emotional Abuse



Setting boundaries is also essential. Boundaries may involve refusing to engage in yelling, manipulation, insults, or intimidation and limiting conversations or contact when abuse escalates. For some individuals, boundaries may include protecting finances, personal privacy, or emotional space. It is important to understand that abusive individuals sometimes react negatively when boundaries are introduced because boundaries disrupt control. In these situations, safety planning may become necessary.

Many people find it helpful to document concerning behaviors such as threats, intimidation, harassment, manipulation, or financial control, especially if legal intervention, custody concerns, or protective actions may later become necessary. **Seeking professional help can also be an important part of recovery.** Trauma-informed therapy can help individuals rebuild self-esteem, recognize abuse patterns, process trauma, improve emotional regulation, and develop healthier coping strategies and relationships. Therapeutic approaches such as CBT, DBT, EMDR, and supportive counseling are often effective in helping survivors heal from the emotional damage caused by chronic abuse.

Most importantly, individuals must understand that they cannot force another person to stop being abusive. What they can do is strengthen their own responses, seek support, establish limits, protect themselves emotionally and physically, and make decisions that increase safety and well-being. Healing from emotional abuse takes time, but with support, self-awareness, and appropriate intervention, recovery and emotional freedom are possible.

If you are experiencing domestic violence or feel unsafe, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or text START to 88788.

What Is "Cortisol Belly" and Can Stress Really Cause Weight Gain?

Many people have heard the term "cortisol belly" on social media or in health discussions. It is often used to describe weight gain around the abdomen that may be connected to chronic stress and elevated cortisol levels. While the term itself is not an official medical diagnosis, there is a real relationship between stress, hormones, and changes in weight and fat distribution.

Understanding Cortisol

Cortisol is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands, which sit on top of the kidneys. It plays an important role in the body by helping regulate:

- stress response,
- metabolism,
- inflammation,
- blood sugar,
- sleep-wake cycles,
- and energy levels.

When a person experiences stress, the body activates the "fight or flight" response. Cortisol and adrenaline are released to help the body stay alert and prepared for danger. In short bursts, this process is normal and helpful. Problems tend to develop when stress becomes chronic and cortisol remains elevated for long periods of time.



Signs That High Cortisol May Be Affecting Health

People experiencing chronically elevated cortisol may notice:

- abdominal weight gain,
- fatigue,
- poor sleep,
- anxiety,
- irritability,
- cravings,
- difficulty concentrating,
- elevated blood sugar,
- or low energy.

In some cases, high cortisol may be linked to medical conditions such as Cushing syndrome, which can cause more noticeable symptoms including:

- a rounded “moon face,”
- fat accumulation around the abdomen and upper back,
- thinning skin,
- easy bruising,
- and muscle weakness.

Anyone concerned about unexplained weight changes or symptoms should speak with a healthcare provider for proper evaluation.

What are the symptoms of Cushing syndrome?



A red, round face



Easy bruising and poor wound healing



High blood pressure



Excessive hair growth
(face, neck, chest, abdomen, breasts and thighs, or balding)



Diabetes



Purple stretch marks over abdomen



Fat pad between shoulders (hump)



General weakness and tiredness (fatigue)



Blurry vision and dizziness



Weak muscles and thinner arms and legs



Low sex drive



Stunted growth in children



How to Reduce Cortisol Naturally

1. Improve Sleep Quality

Poor sleep is one of the biggest contributors to elevated cortisol and weight gain. When the body is sleep deprived, stress hormones rise and cravings for sugar and processed foods often increase.

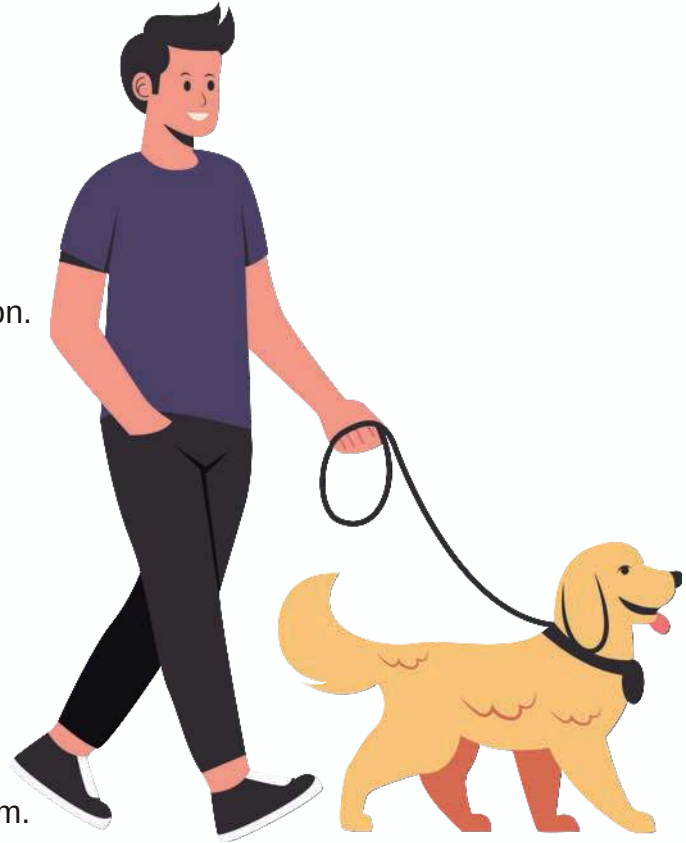
2. Reduce Chronic Stress

Long-term emotional stress keeps the nervous system activated and may contribute to increased cortisol production.

Natural stress-reducing activities include:

- Walking outdoors
- Prayer or meditation
- Journaling
- Deep breathing
- Yoga or stretching
- Therapy or counseling
- Spending time with supportive people
- Engaging in hobbies and creative activities

Even 10–15 minutes daily can help calm the nervous system.



3. Stop Skipping Meals

Skipping meals can cause blood sugar crashes that stress the body and increase cortisol.

4. Reduce Sugar and Processed Foods

Highly processed foods and excess sugar can increase inflammation and contribute to abdominal fat storage.

5. Increase Protein and Fiber

6. Exercise Without Overstressing the Body

Too much intense exercise can sometimes increase cortisol in already stressed individuals.

7. Address Emotional Eating

8. Support Gut Health

Digestive health and stress are closely connected.

9. Limit Alcohol

10. Be Patient With Your Body

Chronic stress may contribute to changes in eating patterns, sleep, activity levels, and hormone regulation that can influence weight over time and usually improves gradually rather than quickly.

WHY YOU'RE NOT LOSING WEIGHT

Have you ever felt frustrated because you're eating what you believe are healthy foods but the scale refuses to budge?

You're not alone.

Many people assume that simply choosing foods labeled as "healthy" will automatically result in weight loss. However, dietitians frequently see patients who are eating nutritious foods yet continue to struggle with losing weight. The reality is that several factors influence weight beyond simply choosing healthy foods.

Here are some of the most common reasons you may not be losing weight despite eating healthy.

Common Reasons

1. Healthy Foods Still Contain Calories

One of the biggest misconceptions about nutrition is that healthy foods can be eaten without limits.

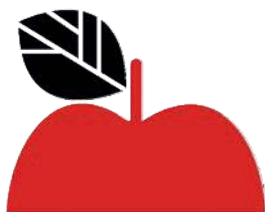
Foods such as:

- Avocados
- Nuts and nut butters
- Olive oil
- Granola
- Trail mix
- Smoothies

are packed with nutrients but are also calorie-dense.

For example:

- One tablespoon of peanut butter contains about 100 calories.
- A handful of mixed nuts may contain 170–200 calories.
- A smoothie can easily exceed 500 calories depending on ingredients.
- Even healthy calories count toward your daily intake



2. Portion Sizes Have Slowly Increased
3. You're Drinking Your Calories
4. You're Not Eating Enough Protein
5. Hidden Sugars Are Sneaking In
6. Lack of Sleep Is Working Against You
7. Chronic Stress Raises Cortisol
8. You're Not Moving Enough
9. Your "Healthy" Foods Are Highly Processed
10. Medical Conditions May Be Contributing
11. Certain medications may also contribute to weight gain.

Why Can't you Sleep?

Have you ever climbed into bed exhausted, only to find yourself staring at the ceiling for hours? Or perhaps you fall asleep easily but wake up repeatedly throughout the night and struggle to get back to sleep.

If so, you're not alone.

According to sleep experts, millions of Americans struggle with sleep problems. Poor sleep affects more than just energy levels—it impacts mood, memory, concentration, weight, blood sugar, heart health, and overall wellbeing.

Understanding why you can't sleep is the first step toward improving it.



The Importance of Sleep

Sleep is not simply a time when the body shuts down. While you sleep, your body is actively: repairing tissues, regulating hormones, processing memories, strengthening the immune system, restoring energy, managing blood sugar levels, supporting emotional health, when sleep is disrupted, nearly every system in the body can be affected.

Common Reasons You Can't Sleep

1. Stress and Anxiety

One of the most common causes of insomnia is stress. When you're worried about: work, relationships, finances, health concerns, family issues, your brain remains alert even when your body is tired.

Stress activates the body's "fight-or-flight" response, increasing cortisol and adrenaline, which make it difficult to relax and fall asleep.



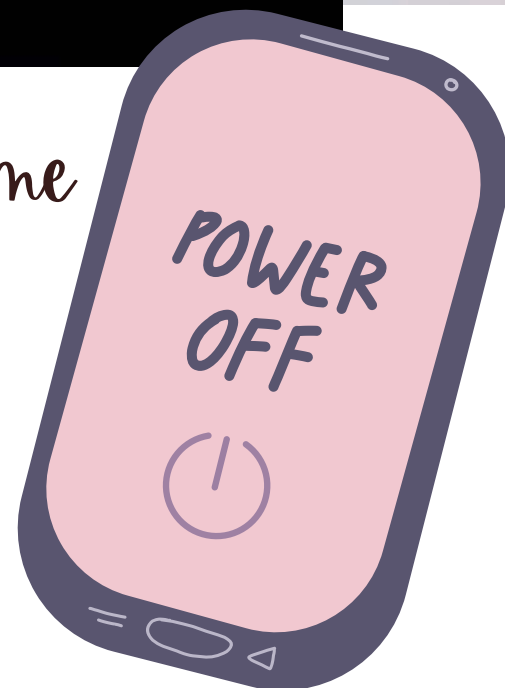
2. Too Much Screen Time

Phones, tablets, televisions, and computers emit blue light that can interfere with your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. Blue light suppresses melatonin, the hormone that signals your brain that it's time to sleep.

Using screens right before bed may:

- Delay sleep onset
- Reduce sleep quality
- Increase nighttime awakenings

Try avoiding screens at least one hour before bedtime.



Caffeine Is Still in your System

Many people underestimate how long caffeine stays active. Caffeine can remain in the body for 6–10 hours or longer. Sources include: coffee, tea, energy drinks, soda, pre-workout supplements, and chocolate. If you're sensitive to caffeine, even an afternoon cup of coffee may affect your sleep later that night.



4. Irregular Schedule

Your body thrives on routine. Common habits that interfere with sleep include:

- Irregular bedtimes
- Sleeping in on weekends
- Napping late in the day
- Eating large meals before bed
- Exercising intensely late at night

5. Blood Sugar Problems

Blood sugar fluctuations can affect sleep quality.

People with:

- Prediabetes
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Insulin resistance

may experience:

- Nighttime awakenings
- Sweating
- Restlessness
- Increased urination
- Hunger during the night

Eating balanced meals throughout the day and limiting sugary snacks before bedtime may help improve sleep.



Other Reasons

6. Depression
7. Chronic Pain
8. Sleep Apnea
9. Hormonal Changes
10. Alcohol and Certain Medications

When to Seek Help

Occasional sleep difficulties are normal. However, you should speak with a healthcare provider if:

- Sleep problems persist for more than a few weeks
- Fatigue affects daily functioning
- You suspect sleep apnea
- You experience significant anxiety or depression
- You rely on sleep medications regularly



RESOURCES TO REDUCE STRESS

Stress is a normal part of life, but when it becomes chronic, it can negatively impact both physical and mental health.

Long-term stress has been linked to anxiety, depression, insomnia, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, weight gain, and weakened immune function. Fortunately, there are many effective ways to reduce stress and improve overall wellbeing.

Regular physical activity such as walking, swimming, stretching, or yoga helps lower stress hormones, improve mood, and increase energy levels.

Deep breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation can calm the nervous system and reduce physical tension. Emotional support is equally important; talking with a counselor, trusted friend, family member, or support group can help process difficult emotions and build resilience.

Journaling can increase self-awareness and help identify sources of stress, while mindfulness and grounding techniques encourage individuals to focus on the present moment rather than worries about the past or future.

Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, or participation in a faith community can provide comfort, hope, and a sense of purpose during difficult times.

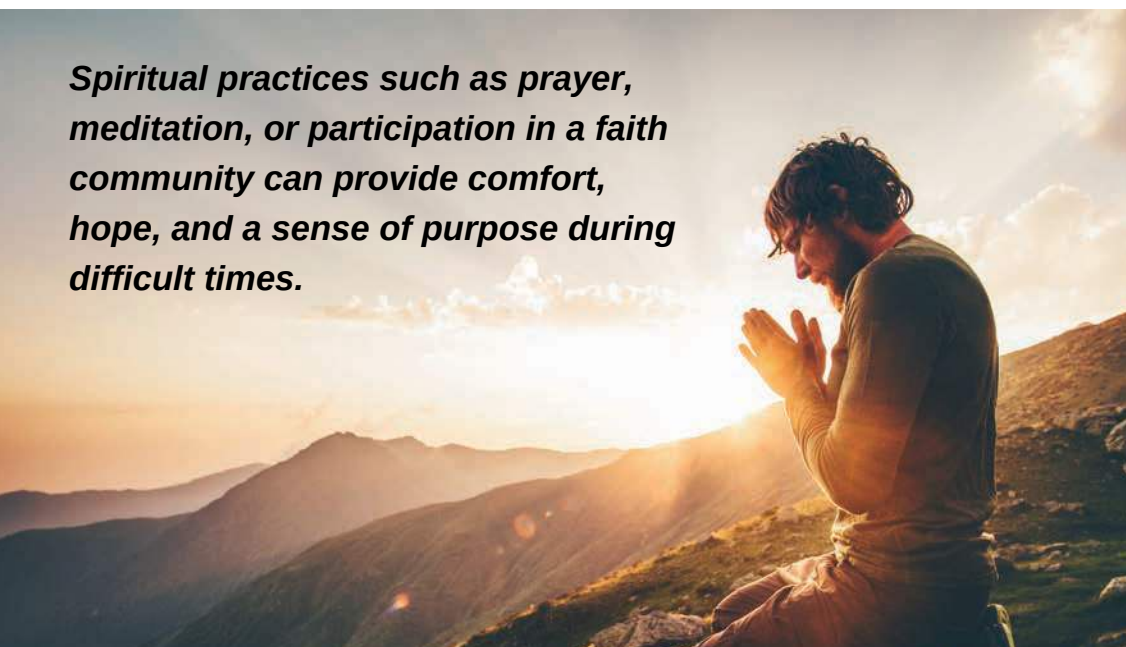


Counseling

A professional can evaluate your symptoms, provide an appropriate diagnosis, and recommend treatments that can help. Treatments for anxiety disorders often involve psychotherapy, medications, or a combination of the two.

Health for All offers mental and behavioral health counseling.

To schedule an assessment, call
979-774-4176





Healthy lifestyle habits also play a critical role in stress management.

Getting 7–9 hours of sleep each night, eating balanced meals rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains, limiting caffeine and sugar, and staying hydrated can significantly improve emotional and physical health.

Effective time management, setting realistic expectations, and learning healthy boundaries can help prevent feelings of overwhelm.

Community resources such as wellness programs, support groups, recreational activities, volunteer opportunities, and educational classes can also reduce isolation and increase social connection.

While stress cannot always be eliminated, developing healthy coping strategies and utilizing available resources can improve resilience, emotional wellbeing, and quality of life.

Small, consistent actions practiced daily often produce the greatest long-term benefits.

Visit the Health for All website for a list of community resources.

www.hlth4all.org

Wellness in Action: Building Healthy Habits

For One on One Coaching in the Health for
All nutrition program, send an email to

Imsw@hlth4all.org

Provide your preferred days and times with a
contact phone number.

Health For All

3030 East 29th Street, Suite 111 | Bryan, Texas 77802

Phone: 979-774-4176 | Fax: 979-774-4180

