

RECOVER ARRIVE BECOME

CLINICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

RELIGIOUS TRAUMA

RECOGNIZE • SUPPORT • HEAL

When belief, belonging, or spiritual authority becomes a source of fear, shame, coercion, or control.

WHAT RELIGIOUS TRAUMA MEANS

- Religious trauma describes lasting distress connected to harmful, coercive, shaming, or abusive experiences involving religion, spirituality, leaders, family, or a faith community.
- It is not one single diagnosis, and reactions vary.
- Religion itself is not inherently harmful.

HARM CAN LOOK LIKE

- Using sacred texts, teachings, or spiritual authority to excuse abuse or demand obedience.
- Punishing questions, doubts, disagreement, identity, or attempts to leave.
- Threats of divine punishment, shunning, family loss, or community rejection.
- Forced confession, humiliation, surveillance, isolation, or exploitation.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Fear, panic, numbness, anger, sadness, or deep shame.
- Nightmares, unwanted memories, avoidance, or feeling on guard.
- Strong body reactions to prayers, music, clothing, buildings, leaders, or religious language.
- Grief over lost family, community, identity, meaning, or certainty.

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- Abuse is never justified by belief.
- A respected leader can still cause harm.
- Your reaction does not prove that you are weak, immoral, disloyal, or spiritually flawed.
- You do not have to decide today whether to keep, change, rebuild, or leave a faith tradition.

WHAT CAN SUPPORT HEALING

- Safety: Limit contact or create a safety plan when coercion, threats, stalking, violence, or abuse is present.
- Choice: Set your own pace and boundaries. You decide whether spirituality is part of your healing.
- Support: Talk with safe people who listen without debating, blaming, preaching, or pressuring forgiveness.
- Skilled care: Consider a trauma-informed clinician who respects your beliefs.

GROUNDING & SUPPORT

- Support sleep, food, movement, calming practices, routines, and connection that help your body feel safer.
- If a child or vulnerable person may be in danger, contact the proper protection agency or emergency services.
- 988: call or text for emotional crisis. 911: immediate danger.
- DV Hotline: 800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. RAINN: 800-656-4673.

Your path belongs to you.

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