



Learning about Trauma:
GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



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Today, we are living through a trauma epidemic. Inequality, injustice, violence and natural disasters have exposed many of us to experiences that deeply wound our bodies, minds, and spirits. But healing is possible.

Trauma Healing Institute created this discussion guide to help groups of people to learn about trauma and healing together, using materials that are based on mental-health best practices and the wisdom of the Bible.

How to use this guide

This discussion guide is flexible by design. It can work as **one two-hour session** with breaks, **two 45-minute sessions**, **three 45-minute sessions**, or whatever format best fits your group.

Materials

If your group is meeting in person, you'll need:

- A screen, laptop or device to show the [“What is Trauma?” video](#)
- Printed copies of [The Safe Listener’s Promise and Three Questions](#) (one for each person)
- Printed copies of the [Lament](#) booklet (one for each person)
- Something to write with

If your group is virtual, you can send the links to these resources to your group in advance.

Tips for your group

This discussion guide will work in all kinds of groups. Your group might be made up of couples, a family, a work group, or people who share any other kind of community. You can lead this discussion in a group as small as three people. If you have a large number of people in your group,

just break into smaller groups for discussion so that everyone has time to share.

If your group meets in person, it's important to **find a safe and quiet place** so that people can talk freely. Babies and small children should be cared for so parents can talk without being distracted by them. If your group meets online or by phone, ask everyone who attends to be in as safe and quiet a place as they can find.

It's okay if some people in your group don't want to come to a discussion like this. Don't force them. If some people in your group do not want to talk about trauma and healing, invite them to listen if they would like to, and don't push them to speak. **It's important that everyone in your group choose freely whether or not to attend, whether or not to speak, and what to say if they do.**

A word of encouragement

Talking about trauma and healing can be intimidating. What if someone shares something too upsetting? What if you say the wrong thing? These worries are normal, and there are no easy answers. But they show you have a desire to move toward healing. Trust that! Experience as a pastor, a counselor, or discussion leader will be helpful, but they aren't required. **The desire to move toward healing is the only qualification you need to use this discussion guide safely.** Trust yourself, trust the people in your group, and trust God.

Introduction

Before you start, it can help to lead the group in prayer or meditation to help everyone feel safe and comfortable.

Introduce the activity by saying something like this:

We are going to talk about the topic of trauma so that we can learn how to care well for ourselves and for others who may be experiencing deep suffering. We will watch a short video, talk about the concept of trauma, discuss how to listen well to the pain of others, and learn the ancient practice of lament. Let's begin by remembering to care well for each other during this time. We want to listen well, respect each other, and to give space for all voices to be heard. Of course, no one will be asked to share personal information. But if anyone chooses to, we agree to keep it confidential. Can we all agree on this?

Part One: Learn about trauma

“What is Trauma?”

1. Watch the video.

When everyone is ready, watch the one-minute [“What is Trauma?” video](http://bit.ly/what-is-trauma) (<http://bit.ly/what-is-trauma>).

2. Talk about the group’s personal reactions to the video.

Ask questions like:

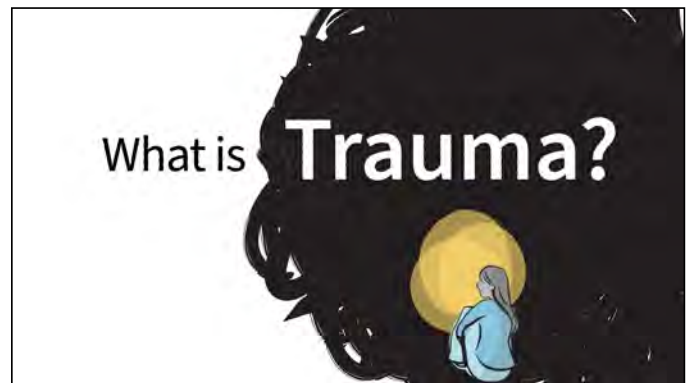
- What ideas, concepts and emotions did you notice in the video?
- What effects does trauma produce in people’s lives?
- What questions did the video bring up for you?
- How are people experiencing trauma in communities you’re part of?

3. Talk about how trauma affects communities.

Play the video again, this time asking the group to think about how trauma might show up in the communities they are part of.

Ask questions like:

- The video said that trauma can affect whole communities. How do you think that happens?
- How does trauma show up in the communities you belong to?
- What in one thing you could do as an individual to support communities where many people are suffering from the pain of trauma?
- What is one thing we might do together [as a church, school, etc.] to support these communities?



Part Two: Learn about safe listening

The Safe Listener's Promise and the Three Questions

Make sure everyone in the group has a copy of The Safe Listener's Promise and the Three Questions. You can choose the format you like best: [wallet card](http://bit.ly/3-questions-wallet-card) (<http://bit.ly/3-questions-wallet-card>), [bookmark](http://bit.ly/3-questions-bookmark) (<http://bit.ly/3-questions-bookmark>), or [desk/table tent](http://bit.ly/3-questions-table-tent) (<http://bit.ly/3-questions-table-tent>).

4. Learn how to be a safe listener.

One of the most important things we can do to help people who have been through trauma is to listen in a way that supports healing. Review the Safe Listener's Promise as a group.

After you have read through it carefully together, ask questions like:

- Think about a time when you were hurting and someone really listened to you. What did they do that was helpful?
- Why do you think it helps someone to tell their story?
- What parts of the Safe Listener's Promise feel most important to you? Which parts feel challenging?

5. Learn how to ask the Three Questions.

Review the Three Questions as a group.

After you have read through them carefully together, ask questions like:

- Why might a person be afraid to tell their story?
- How would you feel if someone asked you the Three Questions? How would they help you tell your story better?

THE SAFE LISTENER'S PROMISE

I will listen to understand.

I will keep what you
share private.

I will not minimize
your pain.

I will not compare your pain
with my own.

I will not give quick solutions.

I will listen again when you
want to share more.

3 QUESTIONS TO ASK SOMEONE WHO IS HURTING:

1 | What happened?

2 | How did it make
you feel?

3 | What was the
hardest part for
you?

*Thank the person for sharing,
and be willing to listen again.*

Part Three: Learn the practice of lament

Lament: A prayer for times like these

Give everyone in the group a copy of the “[Lament](http://bit.ly/how-to-lament)” booklet (<http://bit.ly/how-to-lament>).

6. Learn about lament.

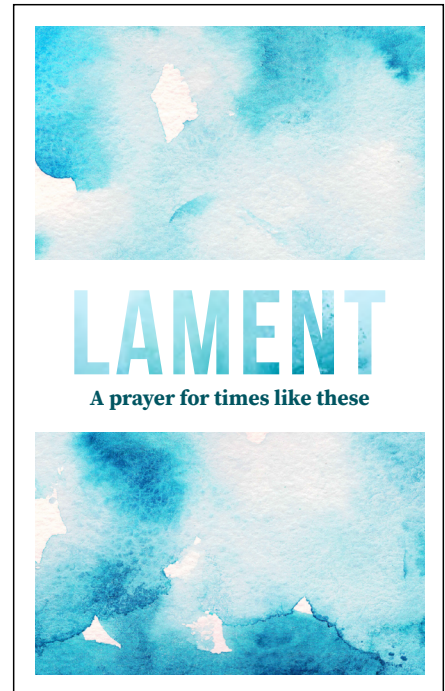
One powerful way for individuals and communities to begin to heal from trauma is to share our pain and complaints with God in a prayer called a *lament*. Review the instructions in “Lament” with the group.

After you have read through it together, discuss these questions:

- What does crying out to God mean to you?
- Why is it important to express our pain and complaints to God?
- How can lamenting help preserve our trust in God?
- Is there anything that our community might want to lament?

7. Invite people to write their own lament.

Give people 20 to 30 minutes to write their own laments in silence. Then, invite people to share their laments with each other in pairs or small groups, if they feel comfortable.



For more simple resources about trauma healing, visit traumahealingbasics.org and subscribe to receive new free resources as we create them. If you feel called to a deeper trauma healing ministry, go to traumahealinginstitute.org to learn how to get started.