

RELIGIOUS REEVALUATION TOOLKIT

An educational guide for examining beliefs,
navigating change, and finding support



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EDUCATIONAL DISCLAIMER

- This material contained in this toolkit is provided for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended to serve as psychotherapy, medical advice, or professional treatment. Engaging with this toolkit does not establish a therapeutic relationship.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

- Some of the topics discussed in this educational toolkit may bring up difficult emotions or distress for certain individuals. If you find yourself struggling or in crisis, you do not have to navigate it alone. **Call or text 988** to connect with the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for free, confidential support available 24/7. If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or seek emergency medical support.
- Additional resources are located in the resource section of the NaturalView website (<https://naturalview.org>)



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INTRODUCTION



- At various points in life, beliefs and values that once felt stable may begin to feel uncertain or no longer fully aligned.
- This experience—referred to in this toolkit as ***religious reevaluation***—can emerge gradually or suddenly and is often shaped by life transitions, new information, relational experiences, or internal reflection.

RELIGIOUS REEVALUATION TOOLKIT (RRT)PURPOSE



Religious reevaluation does not require leaving religion, adopting new beliefs, or arriving at a specific conclusion. This process is often described as religious *deconstruction*.

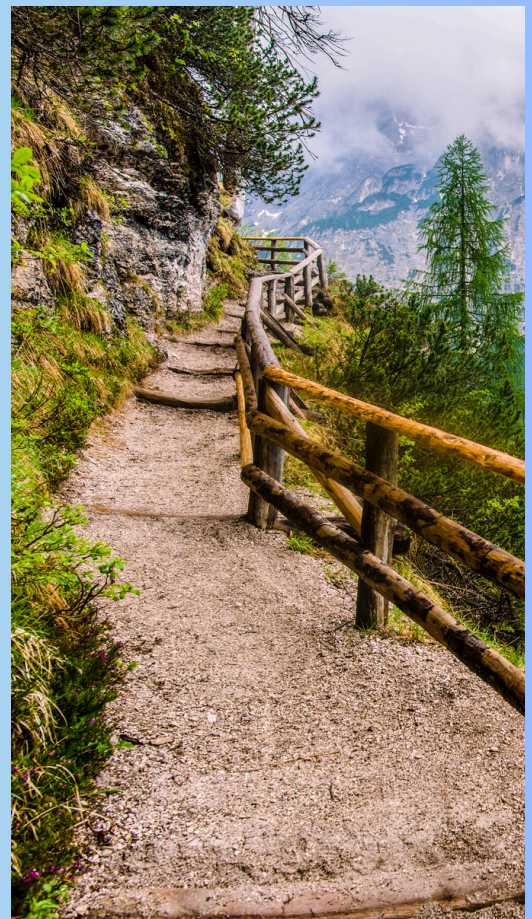
The term **religious reevaluation** is used here to emphasize reflection, autonomy, curiosity and self-directed meaning making rather than movement toward any specific belief or conclusion.

The RRT is designed to *normalize this process, reduce isolation, and offer pathways for understanding, support, and personal growth.* 5

WHO THE RRT IS FOR

This resource may be helpful to you if you:

- Are questioning or reexamining the beliefs you were taught
- Feel internal conflict, guilt, fear, or confusion related to religion
- Are exploring identity, values, or meaning
- Want to understand why this process can feel destabilizing
- Have experienced emotional or psychological distress connected to religious experiences



People engage in religious reevaluation across a wide spectrum—from early cognitive dissonance to more significant emotional or trauma-related impacts. You do not need to identify with a specific label for the RRT to be useful.

WHO THE RRT IS NOT FOR



The RRT is designed for education and reflection. It may not meet your needs if you are:

- Seeking specific direction about what to believe
- Looking for the promotion of a particular religion or belief system
- Wanting personalized advice or solutions for your individual situation
- Hoping this resource will replace therapy, medical care, or professional support

The RRT is intended to inform and support—not direct or persuade.

PART 1

RELIGIOUS

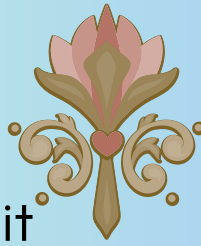
REVALUATION



RELIGIOUS REEVALUATION

What Is Religious Reevaluation?

Religious reevaluation refers to the process of examining beliefs, teachings, and values that were learned earlier in life. For some, this process begins with curiosity or questioning; for others, it may emerge from discomfort, contradiction, or lived experience.



Reevaluation is not inherently negative. It reflects cognitive development, autonomy, and a natural desire for alignment between internal values and external belief systems.

Common Triggers for Reevaluation

- Exposure to new perspectives or information
- Life transitions or major stressors
- Incongruence between beliefs and personal values
- Experiences of exclusion, harm, or discrimination
- Persistent feelings of never being 'good enough' within the religious environment.

When Beliefs Feel Conflicting

- Sometimes what we were taught no longer matches our lived experience or values. This mismatch can create an uncomfortable sense of inner conflict—like being pulled in two directions at once



Identity and Uncertainty

- For many people, religion is intertwined with identity, family roles, morality, and belonging. Reevaluation may therefore bring grief, confusion, or fear alongside curiosity.
- Uncertainty can feel destabilizing, particularly for individuals raised in environments emphasizing absolute truth or certainty.

PART 2

WHEN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES FEEL HARMFUL OR OVERWHELMING



POSSIBLE EXPERIENCES WITH RELIGION/ HIGHLY CONTROLLED RELIGIONS (HCR)*



People experience the impact of religion in different ways.

Religious beliefs and environments do not affect everyone the same way. Some people find comfort, meaning, and a sense of peace through religion and do not experience adverse effects. Others may experience mild inner conflict or confusion, while some encounter deeper or more lasting psychological impacts depending on their experiences and circumstances.

A Spectrum of Potential Experiences located on the next page is not a diagnosis and not a hierarchy—it simply reflects the range of *possible* experiences. Some clinicians use terms such as moral injury, religious trauma, PTSD, or complex trauma to describe experiences on the far end of this spectrum.

People may move back and forth along this spectrum over time.

*A highly controlled religion (HCR) is one in which authority, beliefs, behaviors, and relationships are tightly regulated, often limiting personal autonomy and discouraging questioning or independent decision-making.

A SPECTRUM OF POTENTIAL EXPERIENCES

Belief Questioning & Curiosity

- Mild uncertainty
- Questions about teachings or values
- Curiosity without distress


Confusion or Inner Conflict

- Feeling torn between beliefs and lived experience
- Guilt or anxiety about questioning
- Pressure to “figure it out”

Emotional Distress

- Persistent fear, shame, or self-doubt
- Difficulty trusting one’s own thoughts or feelings
- Distress related to morality, identity, or worth

PTSD or Complex Trauma

- Symptoms consistent with PTSD or complex trauma
- Strong physiological reactions to religious reminders 
- Long-term impacts on identity, safety, and emotional regulation

Trauma-Related Impact

- Ongoing nervous-system activation (easily startled, panic, emotional numbing)
- Intrusive thoughts or fear responses linked to religious themes
- Difficulty with relationships, boundaries, or self-trust

Religious Hurt or Moral Injury

- Feeling harmed by messages about sin, punishment, gender, sexuality, or obedience
- Loss of safety, belonging, or meaning
- Grief, anger, or betrayal related to religious experiences

WAYS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES CAN AFFECT WELL-BEING

The impact of religious experiences does not always appear in obvious ways. Sometimes it becomes visible in how we relate to ourselves, others, and the world—through recurring emotions, thinking patterns, or coping strategies. You may recognize some of these patterns, or none at all.

Emotional Experiences

- Chronic guilt or shame
- Feeling “not good enough” or fundamentally flawed
- Fear of making mistakes or disappointing others
- Anxiety related to morality, punishment, or being judged
- Difficulty trusting your own thoughts or feelings

Thinking Patterns

- Black-and-white or “all or nothing” thinking
- Harsh self-criticism
- Feeling responsible for others’ emotions—My feelings are not important
- Believing you must earn love or worth
- Persistent self-doubt

Behavioral or Coping Patterns

- People-pleasing or difficulty setting boundaries
- Avoiding conflict or authority figures
- Perfectionism or over-functioning
- Numbing behaviors /Addictive Behaviors/Compulsivity (overworking, substances, food, social media, etc.)

Body & Nervous System

- Chronic tension or hypervigilance
- Panic or fear responses tied to religious reminders
- Difficulty relaxing or feeling safe
- Emotional numbness or shutdown



WHAT IS RELIGIOUS TRAUMA?

Religion: Comfort for Some, Harm for Others

Religion can be a source of comfort, meaning, and connection for many people. For others—especially within highly controlled or fear-based environments—religious experiences can leave lasting emotional and psychological wounds.

Defining Religious Trauma

Religious trauma refers to the chronic distress that can develop when beliefs, teachings, or religious systems rely on chronic fear, shame, control, or loss of personal autonomy.



Recognized by Clinicians and Researchers

Therapists and researchers increasingly recognize religious trauma as a real and meaningful experience. Laura Anderson, PhD, author of *When Religion Hurts You*, observes, “Many people leave religion, but religion does not always leave their bodies.” Similarly, Hillary McBride, author of *Holy Hurt*, notes that “Spiritual harm can live in the body long after the beliefs change.”

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS TRAUMA?

Understanding the Impact

Acknowledging religious trauma is not about rejecting religion or assigning blame to a particular belief system. It is about understanding the impact of how religion was experienced—and how those experiences may continue to shape emotions, thoughts, and even the body.

Religious trauma is more likely to develop in environments where:

- questioning or doubt is discouraged
- authority is rigid or unquestionable
- love or belonging feels conditional
- fear or punishment are used to guide behavior
- identity or boundaries are suppressed
- Over time, these conditions can shape how a person relates to themselves, others, and even their own sense of safety.



WHAT IS RELIGIOUS TRAUMA?

What Religious Trauma Might Feel Like

Some people notice:

- chronic guilt or shame
- feeling “not good enough” or fundamentally flawed
- difficulty trusting themselves
- anxiety tied to religious ideas
- loss of identity or belonging
- stress responses similar to trauma

Experiences vary widely. Some people feel mildly affected, while others develop symptoms that resemble PTSD or complex trauma.

...Additional Considerations

Not everyone raised in a highly controlled religion experiences harm. However, when fear, shame, or control are central to spiritual formation, lasting psychological effects often develop.

If any of this resonates, you are not alone—and support is available.

The next section of the RRT offers simple, practical steps to help you care for any effects you may notice. If you find that additional or more specialized support would be helpful, further options will be provided as well.



PART 3

PERSONAL GROWTH &

HEALING OPTIONS

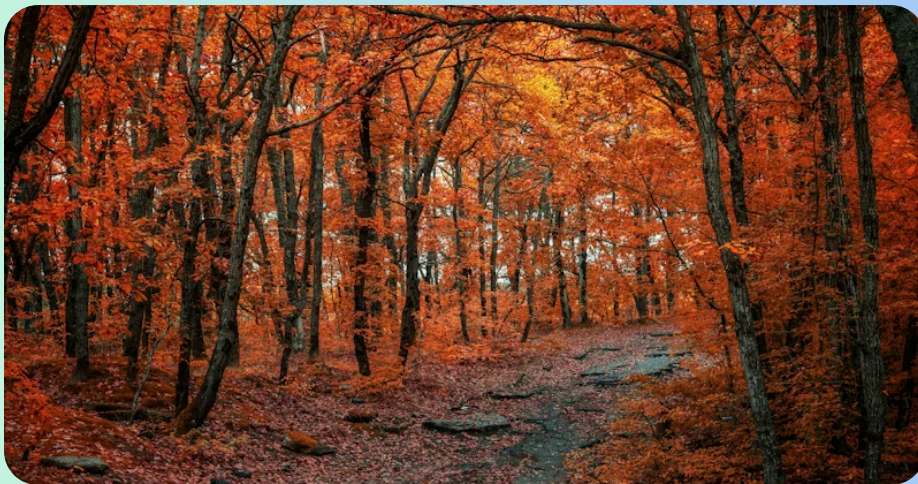


SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT YOURSELF

Small, everyday practices can make a meaningful difference for wherever you may find yourself on the spectrum of potential experiences.

Before seeking formal support, many people find it helpful to experiment with simple tools that calm the body, clarify the mind, and create moments of safety.

You don't need to do everything—explore what feels accessible.



Supporting Emotional Experiences

(shame, sadness, overwhelm, self-criticism)

- Listening to music that matches or gently shifts your mood
- Creating art, journaling, or expressive writing
- Spending time with safe, supportive people
- Practicing self-soothing touch (hand on heart, gentle pressure, wrapping in a blanket)
- Speaking to yourself with the same kindness you would offer a friend

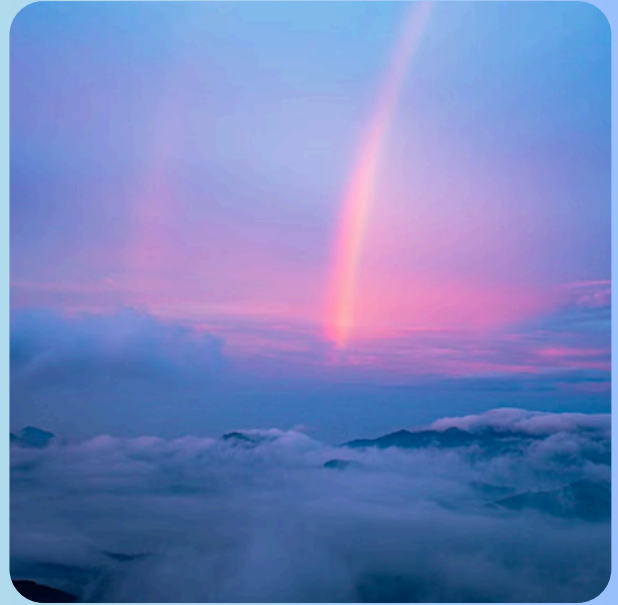
SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT YOURSELF

Supporting Thinking

Patterns

(rumination, rigid beliefs, self-doubt)

- Writing thoughts down to see them more clearly
- Values clarification exercises (“What actually matters to me?”)
- Reading diverse perspectives outside your previous belief system
- Limiting exposure to triggering or high-pressure conversations
- Taking “question breaks” instead of trying to solve everything at once



Supporting Behavioral or Coping Patterns

(isolation, numbing, perfectionism, overworking)

- Gentle daily structure or routines
- Short outdoor walks or movement breaks
- Reducing all-or-nothing goals into small steps
- Connecting with one safe person or group
- Replacing numbing habits with grounding activities (tea, shower, stretching, fresh air)

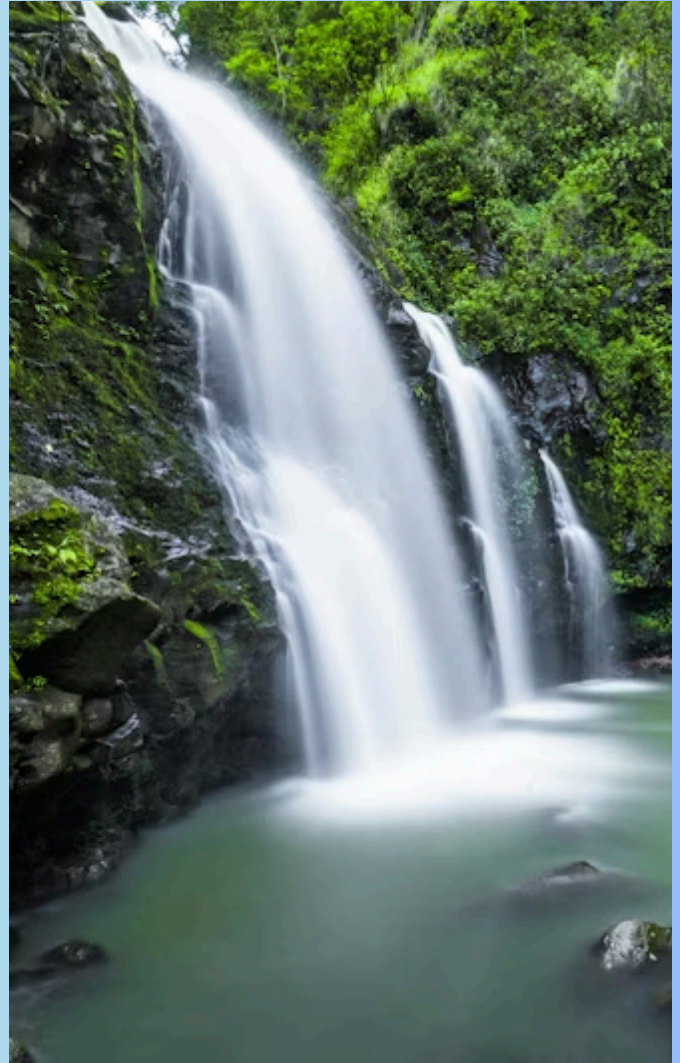


SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT YOURSELF

Supporting the Body & Nervous System

(anxiety, tension, shutdown, hypervigilance)

- Slow breathing or extended exhale breathing
- Humming, singing, or listening to calming sounds
- Gentle yoga, stretching, or shaking out tension
- Cold water on the face or brief cool showers
- Rhythmic movement (walking, rocking, swaying)
- Time in nature or sunlight



...Additional Considerations

These practices are not cures or requirements—just options.

Small moments of regulation often create the foundation for deeper healing over time.



WHEN PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MAY BE HELPFUL



- Many people find that self-support practices bring meaningful relief and clarity. At the same time, there may be periods when additional support helps the process feel safer, less overwhelming, and easier to navigate.
- Professional support is one of many paths available and can offer additional space for healing, understanding, and growth.

Persistent emotional distress

- Ongoing anxiety, shame, or fear
- Feeling emotionally overwhelmed or stuck
- Difficulty finding relief through self-support alone

Inner conflict that affects daily life

- Difficulty trusting yourself or your decisions
- Feeling torn between beliefs, values, or identities
- Loss of meaning, direction, or sense of self

Patterns that affect your well-being

- Isolation or withdrawal from others
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Reliance on numbing or coping behaviors

Body-based stress responses

- Chronic tension, panic, or hypervigilance
- Feeling unsafe, shut down, or on edge
- Strong reactions connected to religious memories or themes

✦ WHEN PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MAY BE HELPFUL ✦

Professional support offers a safe, neutral space to:

- understand your experiences more clearly
- reduce shame and self-blame
- calm the nervous system
- rebuild trust in yourself
- explore identity, values, and meaning

Group support can also be especially helpful in reducing isolation and restoring a sense of belonging.



...Additional Considerations

Seeking support does not mean something is wrong with you. It simply means you are giving yourself additional care during a period of growth, healing, or transition. You remain in control of your process, and support is available if and when you choose it.

SELF-SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Both self-support and professional support can be valuable. Many people use a combination of both at different points in their healing and growth.

Self-Support

(Independent, self-directed practices)

Focus

- Building awareness and self-understanding
- Supporting emotional and nervous system regulation

Examples

- Breathwork, movement, and grounding
- Journaling or creative expression
- Time in nature or supportive routines

Benefits

- Flexible and self-paced
- Strengthens self-trust and autonomy
- Can be practiced anytime

Professional Support

(Guided by a trained provider)

Focus

- Exploring deeper emotional patterns
- Healing trauma and restoring safety

Examples

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Trauma-informed or expressive therapies

Benefits

- Provides expert guidance and support
- Offers structured, consistent care
- Helps address persistent or overwhelming distress

Self-support builds personal resilience. Professional support offers additional guidance.

PART 4

TYPES OF SUPPORT

AND HOW

TO FIND IT



TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPY OPTIONS

Support for Different Points Along the Spectrum of Potential Experiences



- People seek therapy for many reasons. Some are navigating confusion, inner conflict, or identity changes. Others may be experiencing emotional distress, religious hurt, or trauma-related symptoms.
- Trauma-informed therapies are designed to help individuals safely process difficult experiences, reduce distress, and restore a sense of safety and self-trust.
- These approaches have been supported by clinical research and are widely used in trauma treatment. While therapy is not necessarily a requirement, it can be a valuable resource when additional support feels helpful.

TYPES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPY

The following trauma informed therapies can be helpful across different points along the spectrum—from emotional distress and religious hurt to trauma-related symptoms. Some individuals also find therapy helpful during periods of questioning, identity exploration, or personal growth.



Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

Focus: Helping the brain process and release distressing memories

How it helps:

- Reduces emotional intensity connected to past experiences
- Aids in developing more adaptive and compassionate beliefs about oneself and past experiences
- Supports integration of experiences that were previously overwhelming

Why this matters for religious trauma:

- Adverse religious experiences can become deeply stored in memory. EMDR helps reprocess these experiences, reducing distress and supporting the development of more adaptive and compassionate beliefs about oneself.

Research support:

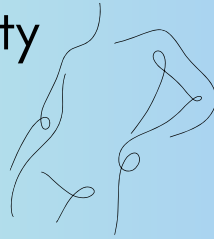
- EMDR is recognized by the World Health Organization and the American Psychological Association as an evidence-based treatment for trauma and PTSD.

Somatic (Body-Based) Therapies

Focus: Restoring nervous system regulation and physical safety

How it helps:

- Releases stress responses stored in the body
- Reduces hypervigilance, shutdown, and chronic tension
- Helps rebuild a sense of safety within the body



Why this matters for religious trauma:

- Fear-based religious conditioning often becomes encoded physiologically, not just cognitively.

Research support:

- Research demonstrates that trauma affects the nervous system, and somatic therapies improve emotional regulation and trauma recovery.



Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP)

Focus: Healing emotional wounds through safe, supportive connection



How it helps:

- Provides a secure therapeutic relationship where emotional pain can be safely experienced and processed
- Supports the development of a more integrated, resilient, and authentic sense of self

Why this matters for religious trauma:

- Highly controlled religious environments often leave individuals carrying shame, fear, and emotional pain in isolation.

AEDP helps heal these wounds through a safe, supportive relationship that allows emotions to be processed and fosters emotional strength, self-trust, and a more secure sense of self.

Research support:

- Clinical research shows AEDP is effective in reducing trauma-related distress and improving emotional resilience and psychological well-being.



TYPES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPY



Internal Family Systems (IFS)

Focus: Healing internal conflict and restoring self-leadership

How it helps:

- Helps individuals understand and relate to protective parts shaped by fear, shame, or control
- Reduces harsh self-criticism and internalized shame
- Strengthens access to a stable, compassionate sense of self

Why this matters for religious trauma:

- Highly controlled religious environments can create internal voices shaped by fear, shame, or judgment. IFS helps individuals relate to these parts with compassion, restoring self-trust and separating their true identity from internalized messages.

Research support:

- Studies show IFS can reduce trauma symptoms, depression, and anxiety while improving emotional well-being.

Art and Expressive Therapies

Focus: Facilitating healing through creative expression (art, dance, creative writing, etc)

How it helps:

- Allows emotional processing beyond words
- Helps access and express experiences stored nonverbally
- Supports identity development and emotional integration

Why this matters for religious trauma:

- Many religious trauma experiences occurred before individuals had language to understand them.

Research support:

- Expressive therapies have been shown to improve emotional regulation and reduce trauma-related distress.



Group Therapy

Focus: Healing through shared experience and relational support

How it helps:

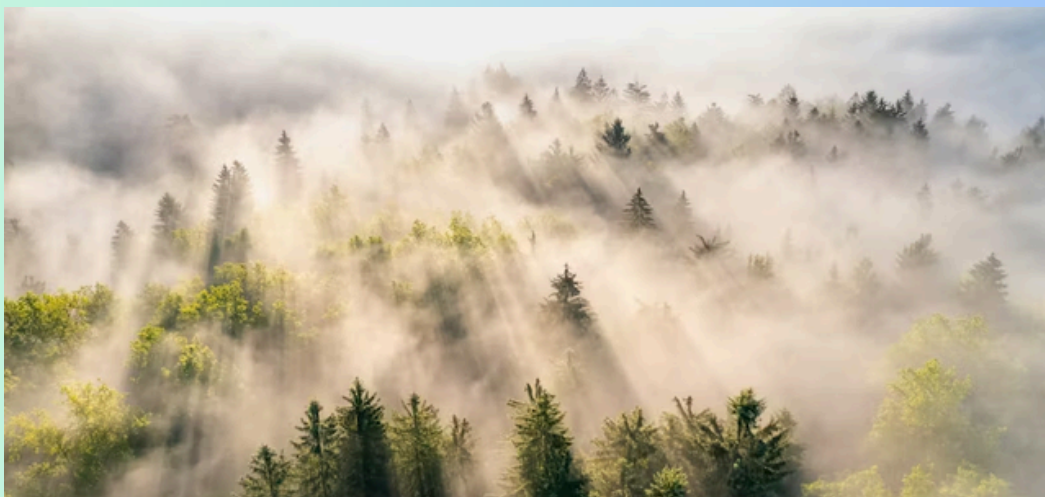
- Reduces isolation and shame
- Normalizes experiences and emotional responses
- Supports rebuilding trust and belonging

Why this matters for religious trauma:

- Religious harm often occurred in community settings—healing in community can be profoundly reparative.

Research support:

- Group therapy is widely recognized as effective in treating trauma and improving psychological well-being.



WHICH THERAPY MIGHT FIT YOUR NEEDS?

Different therapies support different types of experiences. The chart below offers general guidance based on where you may find yourself along the spectrum. Many people benefit from a combination of approaches.

EXPERIENCE	WHAT YOU MAY BE NOTICING	BENEFICIAL THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES
<p>Belief Questioning or Confusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about beliefs or identity • Inner conflict or loss of clarity • Desire to explore meaning or values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual talk therapy • IFS (Internal Family Systems) • Group therapy • Expressive therapies
<p>Emotional Distress or Religious Hurt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shame, guilt, or fear • Feeling “not good enough” • Anxiety tied to religious messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFS • AEDP • Group therapy • Expressive therapies

EXPERIENCE	WHAT YOU MAY BE NOTICING	BENEFICIAL THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES
<p>Trauma-Related Stress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panic, exaggerated startle response, or shutdown • Persistent fear or nervous system activation • Emotional triggers connected to religious experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMDR • IFS • Somatic therapies • AEDP • Trauma-informed therapy
<p>PTSD or Complex Trauma</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or nightmares • Chronic anxiety or emotional numbness • Difficulty feeling safe or regulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMDR • Somatic therapies • IFS • Trauma-informed therapy

There is no single “correct” therapy. The most important factor is finding a provider who feels safe, respectful, and supportive of your autonomy.



FINDING A PROVIDER

Finding the right therapist is a personal process. While different therapy approaches can be helpful, the most important factor is often whether you feel safe, respected, and understood. Many therapists offer brief consultations, which can help you determine whether they are a good fit for your needs and preferences.

Questions to Consider Asking When Looking for a Religious Informed and Trauma-Informed Therapist

What is your experience working with religious trauma or individuals reevaluating their beliefs?

This helps you understand whether they are familiar with the unique emotional and identity challenges involved.

How do you support clients in exploring their beliefs without influencing their personal values?

A trauma-informed therapist will respect your autonomy and support your process without imposing their own views.

What is your approach to working with shame, fear, or trauma-related symptoms?

This can help you understand how they address emotional and nervous system responses



FINDING A PROVIDER



Questions to Ask When Looking for a Religious Trauma-Informed Therapist

How do you help clients rebuild trust in themselves and their own decision-making?

Healing often involves restoring confidence in your inner voice and personal authority.

What therapy approaches do you use, and how might they help in my situation?

This gives insight into their methods and how they support healing.

How do you create a sense of safety and collaboration in your work with clients?

The therapeutic relationship itself is an important part of healing.

...**Additional Considerations:** It is okay to speak with more than one therapist before deciding who feels like the right fit. Finding a therapist who aligns with your needs and preferences is an opportunity to prioritize your well-being and honor what feels safe and supportive for you.

FINDING A PROVIDER

The following directories can help you identify therapists who offer supportive, trauma-informed care and align with your personal goals and values.

Therapist Directories



Psychology Today

Website:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

One of the largest therapist directories available. You can filter by location, specialty (including trauma), therapy type, insurance accepted, and personal preferences. Therapist profiles often include photos, treatment approaches, and areas of expertise.

Therapy Den

Website:

<https://www.therapyden.com>

A modern therapist directory with an emphasis on inclusivity, trauma-informed care, and culturally competent providers. TherapyDen allows you to filter by specialties, identities, therapy approaches, and specific client needs.

*****Disclaimer:** *The directories are provided for informational purposes only. Inclusion does not constitute an endorsement, and outcomes cannot be guaranteed. Individuals are encouraged to use their own judgment when selecting a provider.*



THERAPIST DIRECTORIES



Secular Therapy Project

Website:

<https://www.seculartherapy.org>

Connects individuals with therapists who use evidence-based approaches and do not rely on religious or spiritual frameworks in treatment. This directory may be especially helpful for individuals seeking secular, non-religious therapy.

Open Path Collective

Website:

<https://openpathcollective.org>

Provides access to licensed therapists who offer reduced-fee sessions for individuals without insurance or with financial constraints. Session fees typically range from \$40-\$70, making therapy more financially accessible.

Inclusive Therapists

Website:

<https://www.inclusivetherapists.com>

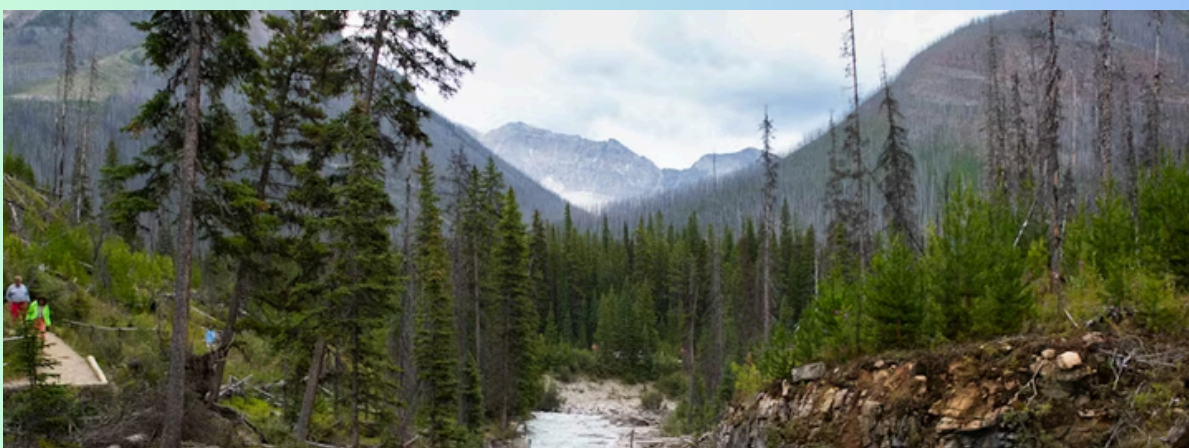
Focuses on connecting clients with therapists who practice cultural humility and trauma-informed care. You can search for therapists experienced in working with identity, trauma, and diverse life experiences.

EMDR International Association (EMDRIA)

Website:

<https://www.emdria.org/find-an-emdr-therapist>

Directory of therapists trained in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), an evidence-based therapy for trauma. This directory is useful if you are specifically seeking EMDR-trained providers.

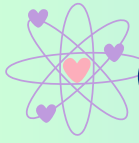


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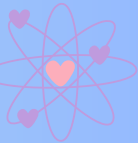
COMMUNITY &

CONNECTION



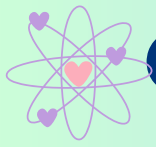


COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

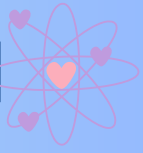


- One of the most challenging aspects of religious reevaluation is navigating changes in community and belonging.
- Religious environments often provide not only shared beliefs, but also social connection, identity, and a sense of place in the world.
- As beliefs shift, some individuals experience distance or estrangement from family members, friends, or communities that were once central to their lives.
- This can bring feelings of loss, loneliness, or uncertainty, while also raising questions about identity and where one now belongs.
- This experience can be *deeply painful*—but it is also a natural part of redefining oneself and a step toward rebuilding community.





COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION



Rebuilding Community and Belonging

- Connection is an important part of emotional well-being. While it may take time, many people gradually build new forms of community that reflect their current values, interests, and sense of self.
- Community does not need to look the same as it did before. It can take many forms and develop slowly over time.

Identity and Belonging Evolve Over Time

- It is common for identity to feel uncertain during periods of transition. Many people find that, over time, new connections and experiences help them develop a stronger, more authentic sense of self.
- Belonging does not require abandoning who you are—it grows from environments where you feel safe, respected, and free to be yourself.



COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Ways to Begin Creating New Connections

Connect with people who share similar experiences

- Support groups for religious trauma or deconstruction
- Online communities focused on healing and identity exploration

Engage in shared interest activities

- Classes, workshops, or hobby groups
- Book clubs, creative groups, or fitness communities

Strengthen existing safe relationships

- Deepening connections with trusted friends or family members
- Spending time with people who respect your autonomy

Explore values-based communities

- Volunteer organizations
- Secular or interfaith communities



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Connecting with others who share similar experiences can reduce isolation and provide support during periods of transition. The following communities offer opportunities for connection, education, and healing.

Religious Trauma and Reevaluation Communities

Reclamation Collective

<https://www.reclamationcollective.com>

Offers support groups, workshops, and resources specifically for individuals healing from religious trauma and spiritual harm.

Journey Free

<https://journeyfree.org>

Provides education, peer support, and recovery resources for individuals leaving high-control religious environments.

Recovering from Religion

<https://www.recoveringfromreligion.org>

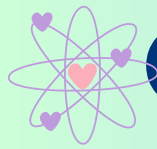
Offers peer support, educational resources, and trained volunteers who provide confidential conversations for individuals questioning or leaving religion.



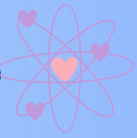
General Mental Health and Peer Support National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Support Groups

<https://www.nami.org/support-education/support-groups>

Offers free peer-led support groups focused on emotional well-being and mental health.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Secular and Non-Religious Community

The Secular Therapy Project Community

<https://www.seculartherapy.org>

In addition to therapist referrals, offers resources and community connections for individuals seeking secular support.

American Humanist Association – Local Chapters

<https://americanhumanist.org>

Provides local groups focused on community, ethical living, and connection without religious affiliation.

Sunday Assembly

<https://www.sundayassembly.org>

A global network of secular gatherings focused on community, reflection, and shared human experience.



Peer Support and Identity Exploration

Exvangelical Community

<https://www.exvangelicalpodcast.com>

Offers community, storytelling, and connection for individuals reevaluating evangelical religious experiences.

Faith to Faithless

<https://www.faithtofaithless.com>

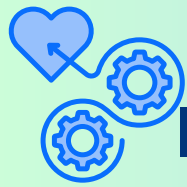
Provides peer support, education, and community for individuals transitioning away from religion.

Building new connections takes time. Many people find that participating in supportive communities helps restore a sense of belonging, understanding, and shared experience.

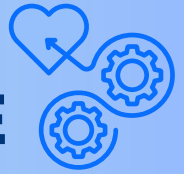
PART 6

**MOVING FORWARD –
INTEGRATION,
MEANING, AND HOPE**



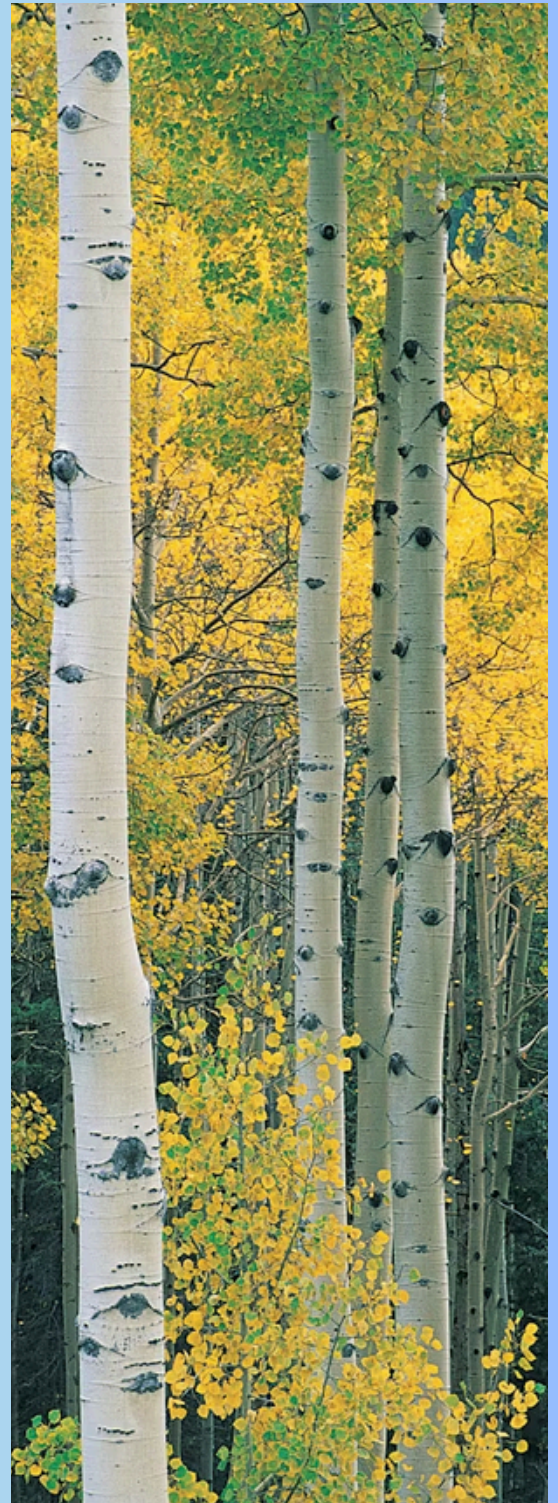


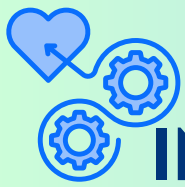
MOVING FORWARD



INTEGRATION, MEANING, AND HOPE

- Reevaluating religious beliefs and experiences can be a complex and deeply personal process. This toolkit has introduced a *spectrum of experiences*—from questioning and inner conflict to emotional distress and trauma-related impacts.
- It has explored how these experiences may affect emotional well-being, thinking patterns, coping behaviors, and the nervous system, while offering self-support practices, professional support options, and pathways to reconnect with community.
- Healing is not a single step, but a gradual process of understanding, regulating, and integrating past experiences. Many people find that, over time, what once felt confusing or overwhelming becomes clearer and more manageable.





MOVING FORWARD

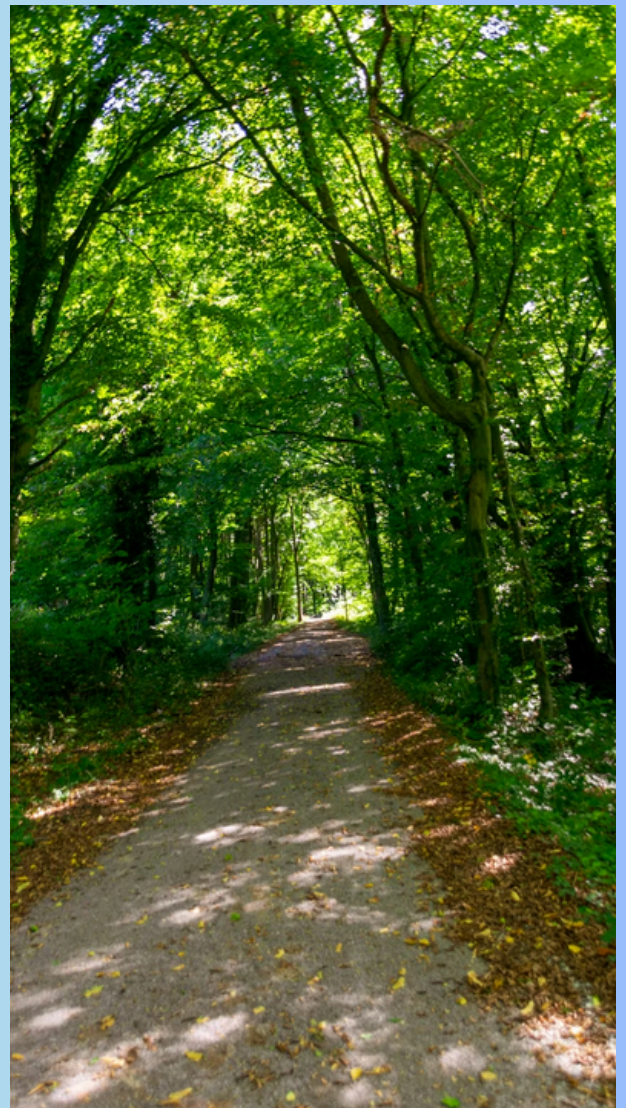


INTEGRATION, MEANING, AND HOPE

With the right support—whether through personal practices, therapy, or community—it is possible to develop a more stable sense of self and renewed trust in your own thoughts, emotions, and inner guidance.

Your Path Is Your Own

- There is no single “correct” way to move forward. Some people continue to reevaluate their beliefs, while others focus more on healing emotional wounds or rebuilding identity and connection.
- Your process may include reflection, exploration, grief, growth—or all of these at different times.
- You are allowed to move at your own pace. You are allowed to change your mind. You are allowed to define meaning and belonging in ways that feel authentic to you.



MOVING FORWARD

INTEGRATION, MEANING, AND HOPE

Healing and Growth Are Possible

- Many individuals who have experienced religious harm go on to build lives grounded in greater self-trust, emotional freedom, and personal meaning. What may begin as uncertainty or loss can, over time, become an opportunity to reconnect with your own values, voice, and sense of agency.
- Healing does not require forgetting your past. It involves integrating your experiences in ways that allow you to move forward with greater clarity, strength, and self-understanding.
- You are not alone in this process. And whatever your path looks like, growth and healing remain possible.



Your story continues to unfold, and you have the capacity to shape what comes next.

APPENDIX

RESEARCH SUPPORTING TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPIES

The therapeutic approaches referenced in this toolkit are supported by clinical research and widely recognized in trauma-informed care. The references below represent a brief selection of foundational research and professional guidelines supporting their effectiveness.

References

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

- de Jongh, A., de Roos, C., & El-Leithy, S. (2024). ***State of the science: Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy.*** *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 37(2), 205–216.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.23012>
- Oren, E., Gündoğmuş, İ., & Yaşar, A. B. (2024). ***EMDR and the AIP model: healing the scars of trauma.*** *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, 1469787. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychiatry/articles/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1469787/full>
- Shapiro, F. (2018). ***Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy: Basic principles, protocols, and procedures*** (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

Internal Family Systems (IFS)

- Hodgdon, H. B., et al. (2022). ***Internal family systems therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder: A pilot effectiveness study.*** *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 31(3), 328–345.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2021.2013375>
- Schwartz, R. C., & Sweezy, M. (2019). ***Internal family systems therapy*** (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. <https://www.guilford.com/books/Internal-Family-Systems-Therapy/Richard-Schwartz-Martha-Sweezy/9781462541461>

RESEARCH SUPPORTING TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPIES

Somatic and Body-Based Therapies

- de Melo Macêdo, S. C. G. ***A systematic review of somatic intervention treatments in PTSD: Does Somatic Experiencing®(SE®) have the potential to be a suitable choice?*** <https://holinahealing.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/3.pdf>
- Payne, P., Levine, P. A., & Crane-Godreau, M. A. (2015). ***Somatic experiencing: Using interoception and proprioception as core elements of trauma therapy.*** *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 93. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00093>
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). ***The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma.*** Viking Press.

Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP)

- Fosha, D. (2000). ***The transforming power of affect: A model for accelerated change.*** Basic Books.
- Iwakabe, S., Edlin, J., Fosha, D., Gretton, H., Joseph, A., Nunnink, S., & Nakamura, Y. (2020). ***The effectiveness of accelerated experiential dynamic psychotherapy (AEDP): A meta-analysis.*** *Psychotherapy*, 57(3), 334-345. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-72096-001>
- Iwakabe, S., Nakamura, K., & Thoma, N. C. (2023). ***Enhancing emotion regulation.*** *Psychotherapy Research*, 33(7), 918-945. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10503307.2023.2183155>

RESEARCH SUPPORTING TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPIES

Group and Expressive Therapies

- Malchiodi, C. A. (2020). ***Trauma and expressive arts therapy: Brain, body, and imagination in the healing process.*** Guilford Press.
- Sayın, A., Candansayar, S., & Welkin, L. (2013). ***Group psychotherapy in women with a history of sexual abuse: what did they find helpful?*** *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 22(23-24), 3249-3258.

These publications reflect a growing scientific understanding of how trauma affects the brain, body, and sense of self—and how evidence-based, trauma-informed therapies can support healing and recovery.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Susan Yuen, LMFT, is the founder of *Compassionately Liberated*, a virtual practice focused on supporting women healing from religious trauma, complex PTSD, eating disorders, disordered eating, and mood disorders.

Susan is an EMDRIA-approved consultant and provides individual and group EMDR consultation for therapists working with complex trauma and ED/DE presentations.

Her lived experience in a high-control religious environment and managing her own history of disordered eating/eating disorder informs her understanding of shame, body oppression, and the need for liberation-centered healing.