



10 Signs Your Childhood Trauma Still Runs Your Life

A Field Guide for Men Who Are Ready to Stop Pretending They're "Fine"

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You don't have to remember everything that happened to know something isn't right. Maybe you've pushed it down for years. Maybe you told yourself you were just being "dramatic" or "weak."

But deep down, something's still off. Childhood sexual abuse doesn't just disappear because we don't talk about it. It hides. It buries itself in our habits, our relationships, our bodies, our beliefs. And as men, we're taught to ignore it, work harder, or man up.

But trauma doesn't heal in silence.

This guide is for you if something inside you whispers: "This is about me."

You're not broken. You're not crazy. You're overdue to stop surviving and start healing.

1. YOU DON'T TRUST ANYONE — INCLUDING YOURSELF



You second-guess your instincts. You hesitate before speaking. You rework texts a dozen times. You avoid decisions—or obsess over them for days.

Underneath it all, you don't trust your own perception. That's because someone once shattered it. When childhood trauma goes unspoken, boys grow into men who constantly ask: Am I overreacting? Did I make it up? What if I'm wrong?

Marcus is 41. On the outside, he's successful: owns a business, pays the bills, shows up for his kids. But inside? He questions everything. Did I say the wrong thing? Is she mad at me? Did that really happen the way I remember it? When you grow up being violated or gaslit, your reality gets hijacked. Marcus second-guesses his instincts constantly, like they can't be trusted. That lack of inner trust makes it hard to make decisions, feel safe in relationships, or believe his own body. Trauma taught him to doubt himself as a way to survive.

Reflection Prompt:

- When's the last time you ignored what you felt... and regretted it?

2. YOU FEEL NUMB... BUT EXPLOSIVE

You're the "calm one," until you're not. You can hold it together for work, family, church—but behind the quiet is chaos.

You're either totally shut down... or seconds from blowing up.

That's not weakness. It's your nervous system doing everything it can to protect you.

Jared never yells. But he goes dead behind the eyes when things get heated. His partner calls it "the wall." Then, out of nowhere, he erupts — not at her, but in the garage, slamming tools or punching a heavy bag. That shut-down-to-blow-up cycle? It's not personality. It's trauma. Jared learned early that emotion was dangerous, so he buried it. But emotions don't disappear. They build. Until they burst.



Reflection Prompt:

- What do you usually do when you feel something big coming up—rage, sadness, fear?

3. YOU DON'T FEEL SAFE IN YOUR OWN BODY



You avoid intimacy. You stay busy to escape quiet moments. You flinch at touch—or only feel alive during risky behavior.

Survivors often disconnect from their bodies. Your body remembers even when your mind doesn't.

Andre a 35-year old male survivor experiences:

- Flinches at touch (not necessarily sexual)
- Panic in stillness or silence
- Constant tension, pain, or being “checked out” from the body
- Hypervigilance or body shame (even alone)
- Feels like his body betrays him

Reflection Prompt:

- What's your relationship to your body right now—friend, enemy, stranger?

4. YOU OVERPERFORM — AND STILL FEEL LIKE A FAILURE

You do everything right. You're responsible, hard-working, maybe even successful.

But no matter how much you achieve, it's never enough. You still feel behind, broken, or not quite “a real man.”

This belief isn't coming from the present. It was planted long ago.

Ben is a decorated veteran and a department head. Everyone sees him as a leader. But inside? He's constantly waiting to be exposed. He downplays his accomplishments and tells himself, “If they really knew me...” That's imposter syndrome with trauma roots. Childhood abuse wires a deep sense of shame, even when you've done everything “right.”

Reflection Prompt:

- What have you accomplished that you still haven't allowed yourself to feel proud of?



5. YOU SABOTAGE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS (OR AVOID THEM ALTOGETHER)



You push people away when they get too close. Or you stay with the wrong ones because chaos feels familiar.

You might have convinced yourself that being alone is “just easier.” But in truth, it might feel safer.

Trevor avoids family gatherings like the plague. Especially if his uncle is there. He tells his wife he just doesn’t like crowds. But his body knows more. It tenses at the sound of a certain voice or the smell of cologne. Trauma lives in the body, and sometimes the body remembers what the mind has buried. That avoidance isn’t random. It’s protection.

Reflection Prompt:

-  What feels more vulnerable to you: being alone... or being known?

6. YOU STRUGGLE WITH SEX — OR USE IT TO ESCAPE

You might feel numb during sex, ashamed afterward, or anxious leading up to it. Maybe it’s easier to disconnect than to stay present.

Or maybe you use sex like a drug — a moment of relief from pain you can’t name.

None of this makes you “broken.” It makes you a survivor.

Jason was 44 when he finally admitted he couldn’t stand being touched — even by people he loved. Hugs made his skin crawl. Sex felt mechanical or triggering. He’d flinch without warning, then feel embarrassed and broken.

As a kid, he learned to disconnect — to go numb while his abuser invaded what should have been a safe body. That shutdown became a habit.

“I wasn’t even aware how much I avoided my body,” he told me. “I worked out constantly, but it was punishment. I stayed distracted. The idea of just being still... that was terrifying.”

In coaching, he learned to rebuild trust with his body — slowly. Through breathing, grounding, and somatic check-ins, he began to feel without running. He started to recognize:

His body was never the problem. It was the victim — and it deserved peace, not punishment.



Reflection Prompt:

- How do you feel after sex? At peace? Ashamed? Alone?

7. YOU'RE HYPER-INDEPENDENT... BUT SECRETLY EXHAUSTED

You never ask for help. You handle everything yourself. You'd rather suffer quietly than look "needy."

But inside, you're exhausted. You might even resent others for not seeing how much you carry.

This isn't strength — it's survival. And it's lonely.

Carlos prides himself on never needing anyone. Raised by a father who shamed him for crying, and a mother who turned away when the abuse happened, he learned one thing: depend on no one. So he does everything himself, even when he's drowning. On the flip side, David clings to anyone who shows kindness, terrified they'll leave. Both patterns are trauma adaptations — one protects by isolation, the other by attachment. Neither feels safe.



Reflection Prompt:

- Who do you let in when you're struggling?

8. YOU HAVE OUTBURSTS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

One small thing sets you off — and suddenly you're yelling, punching walls, walking out the door.

You're not "crazy." These are trauma responses — and you're likely reacting to something from your past, not your present.

Corey was doing everything "right." Married. Two kids. Good job. But one morning, his 7-year-old spilled a bowl of cereal... and Corey lost it.

He slammed the counter, yelled louder than he meant to, and left the kitchen shaking. His wife didn't speak for hours.

Later, sitting in the car alone, he said to himself, "What the hell was that?"

That wasn't about the cereal. That was about control — or rather, the terror of losing it.

As a boy, Corey had to be perfect to stay safe. Spills meant punishment. Mistakes weren't allowed. So when his own child made one, his nervous system fired like it was 1989 all over again. "It wasn't even my kid I was mad at," he told me. "It was this terrified part of me that thought I was about to be hurt."

The more Corey learned about trauma responses, the more compassion he developed — not just for others, but for himself. Because what looks like anger... is often fear in disguise.



Reflection Prompt:

- When's the last time you said, "That wasn't even about them"?

9. YOU APOLOGIZE FOR EXISTING



You apologize too much. You shrink your presence. You don't ask for what you want. You might believe you're too much... or not enough. Shame is sticky. Especially when it was drilled into you early on

Eli was always saying "sorry."

Sorry for asking questions. Sorry for speaking up. Sorry for crying. Sorry for taking up space.

At a weekend men's retreat, breakfast was pumpkin pancakes. Eli didn't eat his. When I asked why, he said quietly, "I don't really like pumpkin," and then — "Sorry."

I smiled and asked, "Why are you apologizing?"

Eli paused. Stared at the table. Then said, "I don't know... I guess I thought I was being rude." But it wasn't about the pancakes.

As a boy, Eli learned that having preferences, opinions, or needs got him punished or ignored. So he became invisible.

Apologizing was his way of trying not to be a burden.

That day, I told him: "You don't have to justify what you like or who you are."

It stunned him. It also cracked something open.

He didn't need to apologize for not liking pumpkin. He didn't need to apologize for being himself.

Reflection Prompt:

- When do you find yourself apologizing for things that aren't wrong?

10. YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE WITHOUT THE PAIN

Derrick had always been the strong one. The provider. The protector. No one ever saw him fall apart. Not even in private.

But when his son left for college and his wife started asking deeper questions, something cracked. "I realized," he told me, "I had no idea who I was outside of surviving."

He built his identity on pain. On proving he wasn't weak. On never letting anyone get too close.

Every achievement, every sacrifice, every sleepless night — it was armor. But under the armor... was a man who didn't really know what he wanted. Or liked. Or needed.

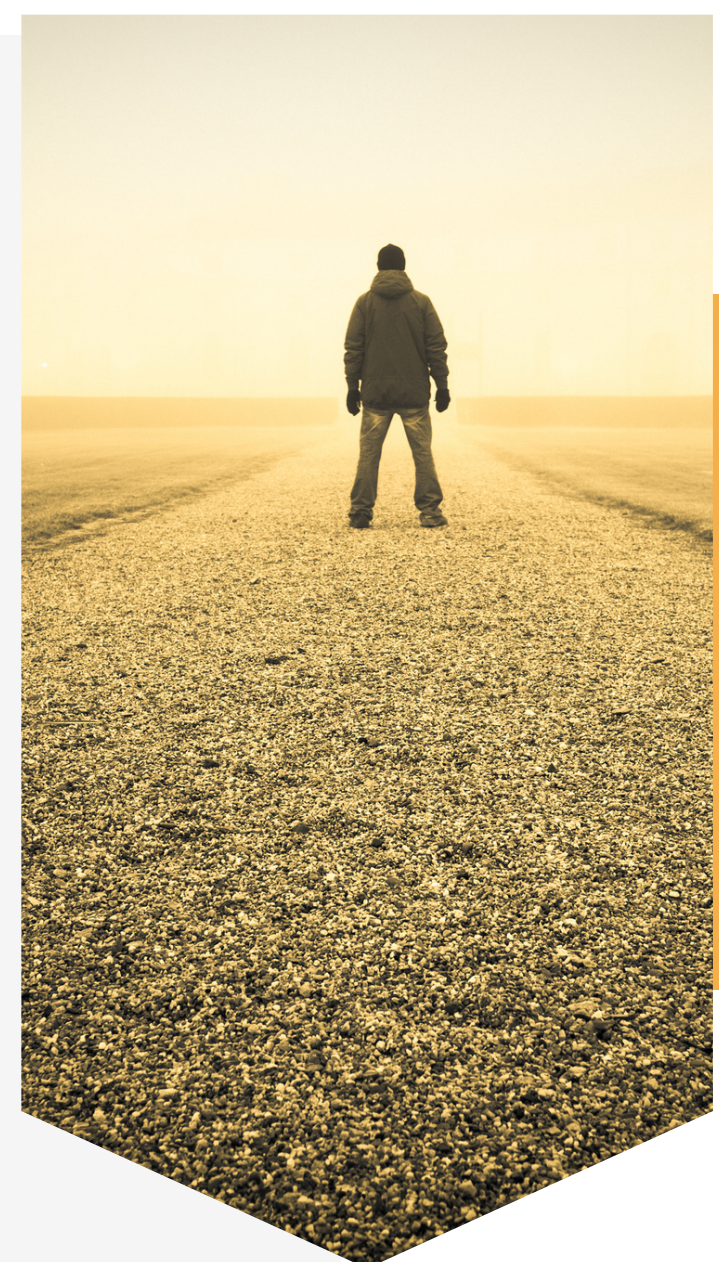
"What would I be if I didn't need to protect myself anymore?" he asked in session.

That question haunted him — and also guided him.

Through journaling, bodywork, and letting one trusted friend really see him, Derrick started exploring joy. Stillness. Music. Sleep.

He wasn't empty without the pain. He was waiting.

For the first time, he wasn't surviving. He was becoming.



Reflection Prompt:

- What would freedom actually feel like in your body, your relationships, your spirit?

If even **one of these signs** hit home, I want you to know this:

You are not alone. You are not crazy. And you do not have to carry this by yourself anymore.

That's why I created a short intro course called **"Survivor Foundations."**

It's just 5 days. It costs less than a fast-food meal. And it's designed for one thing:

To help men like us take the first real step toward healing – safely, privately, and powerfully.

