



# JUDITH HERMAN'S

## 'STAGES OF RECOVERY': UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Claudia Schiek  
Yarrow Place



The experience of  
trauma is one of  
disempowerment and  
disconnection.

Therefore recovery is  
based on the  
empowerment of the  
survivor and the  
creation of new  
meaning.

Judith Herman, 1992



## Why this model?

- Provides broad conceptual framework
- Articulates philosophical base
- Stresses importance of analysis of power
- Helps to set time and pace of therapy
- Considers physical, emotional, social and ideological impacts of trauma
- Emphasises therapeutic alliance
- Considers VT issues



## *The Moral Stance*

**Working with victimised people requires a committed moral stance. The therapist is called upon to bear witness to a crime. S/he must affirm a position of solidarity with the victim. This does not mean that the victim can do no wrong; rather, it involves an understanding of the fundamental injustice of the traumatic experience and the need for a resolution that restores some sense of justice.**

Herman, 1992:135



## *Three Stages of Recovery*

1. Establishment of safety
2. Remembrance and mourning
3. Reconnection

(Judith Herman, 1992)



## *First Stage Establishment of Safety*

1. Control of the body
  - Basic health needs
  - Regulation of bodily functions (sleeping, eating, exercise)
  - Management of post trauma reactions

(Judith Herman, 1992)

## *First Stage Establishment of Safety*



### 2. Control of the environment

- Environment of safe living
- Plan for self protection
- Support system

(Judith Herman, 1992)

## *Some Possible Indicators of Establishment of Safety*



- No longer feels completely vulnerable or isolated
- Able to control most disturbing reactions
- Able to rely on self and others for support (to some degree)
- Sense of deserving support and care

**Transition is gradual**

(Judith Herman, 1992)



## ***Completing the First Stage of Recovery***

Do not explore traumatic experience in detail until the victim / survivor has established a sense of safety within themselves and the environment.

(Judith Herman, 1992)



## ***Second Stage Remembrance and Mourning***

Reconstruction of the trauma involves telling the details of the trauma so that the memory can be integrated into the survivor's life story.

(Judith Herman, 1992)

## *Second Stage Remembrance and Mourning*



- Focus of control remains with client
- Uncovering traumatic memories proceeds in small steps
- Process involves intense grief and mourning
- Goal is integration of affect, memory and cognition
- Creation of new meaning

(Judith Herman, 1992)

## **Second Stage - Summary**



- Trauma work is dance of excavation, psycho-education, processing and integration.
- The client needs to have choices/feel in control.
- In some cases retrieval process must be modified or avoided.

Robert Grant, 2007

## *Third Stage RECONNECTION*



- Task of creating a future
- Develop
  - sense of self
  - relationships
  - a meaning for life "faith"
- Reclaiming life

(Judith Herman, 1992)

## *Third Stage RECONNECTION*



- Take steps to increase sense of power and control in life
- Reconcile with oneself
- Form healthy relationships
- Reconnect with next generation
- In possession of self "I know I have myself".

(Judith Herman, 1992)

## Challenges of trauma work



- **Culture conditions** lead most people to use medical or disease models when confronting psychological distress.
- **Trauma is not simple.**
- Trauma exposes the **lack of control and safety inherent to human existence.**
- **Understanding human distress.** Psychological defences/self-protective behaviours enable survivors to survive.

## Healing from trauma includes

- **No longer being held captive** by the meanings, and implication of trauma-generated realities.
- Healing is an ongoing process of **transformation. Destination is sensed but not known or guaranteed.**
- Healing does not involve **forgetting/necessarily forgiving.**
- Healing requires **acknowledging that one does not have answers to ultimate questions or absolute control over life.**

Adapted from Robert Grant, 2007