

TRAUMA WHISPERS BEFORE IT ROARS

Companion Workbook

Chapter 11:

Systemic Traumas and the Wounds of a Society

Pre-publication Draft

This is a living document.

Changes will be implemented as suggestions arrive.

Changes made since last update:

- Early and advance reader (free) copies printed prior to launch date of 8/12/26 may not match the page numbers noted in the workbook. Readers may need to look for the content on neighboring pages.

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How to Give Feedback

Complete this chapter packet, then visit the OneEmprima.com/books/ or use the QR code on page 21 of your book to access the online feedback form and share your thoughts.

Let us know what helped in the book or workbook, what felt unclear, where you needed more room, and what you want to see included in the future editions of the book or companion workbook.



Check in before you begin. Where are you on the Roar Scale?

If you're at a 5 or above, turn to your Stand-Down Kit before continuing.

Why We Do This Work

Some of the things you believe about yourself may have started as conclusions you made about the world around you.

If speaking up had consequences, silence may have become safety. If the rules changed depending on who was in the room, you may have learned to study the room before deciding who you could be in it. If belonging required you to hide parts of yourself, fitting in may have felt more important than being fully known.

Those responses may have made sense in the environments where you learned them.

The problem is that survival instructions can follow us long after the original environment has changed.

That is why we do this work.

Not to blame every struggle on a system. Not to remove personal responsibility. And not to convince ourselves that everything we learned was wrong.

We do it so we can separate what happened from what we made it mean about ourselves.

Some of these worksheets may help you recognize something you have carried for years as part of your personality, your worth, or simply “the way I am.”

It may not be.

It may be something you learned to become in a place where being anything else did not feel safe.

Widening the Lens

So far, I've asked you to look pretty close to home: your body, childhood, relationships, and the people who helped shape what safety and belonging mean to you.

Now we're widening the lens.

School. Work. Religion. The military. Healthcare. Government. Your neighborhood. Your culture.

These places had rules too. Some were spoken. Some you learned by watching who could break them, who couldn't, and what happened when they did.

What did those systems teach you about who you had to be inside them?

The Systemic Trauma Stones You Carry

In Chapter 11, you encountered six **Systemic Trauma Stones**. You may recognize more than one.

Circle the Stone that feels most familiar:

1. Speaking up will cost me.
2. The rules change depending on who you are.
3. Power protects itself.
4. Justice isn't for everyone.
5. My survival depends on fitting in.
6. The system wasn't built for people like me.

Check the ways you learned to live with it. Then circle the place or system that taught it most strongly. You'll use those three choices in the exercises that follow.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Stay quiet | ☐ Question everything |
| ☐ Work harder | ☐ Take care of everyone else |
| ☐ Be useful | ☐ Never ask for help |
| ☐ Be agreeable | ☐ Hide parts of myself |
| ☐ Become invisible | ☐ Leave before I could be rejected |
| ☐ Prove myself | ☐ Fight back |
| ☐ Follow the rules | ☐ Other: _____ |

Now look at where you may have learned it. Check any that have significantly influenced your sense of safety, worth, voice, opportunity, identity, or belonging.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ School or educational systems | ☐ Racial or cultural expectations |
| ☐ Workplace or professional culture | ☐ Family or community traditions |
| ☐ Military or veteran culture | ☐ Immigration or citizenship systems |
| ☐ Healthcare systems | ☐ Media or social media |
| ☐ Religious or spiritual institutions | ☐ Neighborhood or community conditions |
| ☐ Government or legal systems | ☐ Other: |
| ☐ Economic or class structures | _____ |
| ☐ Gender expectations | |

Circle the **one** that had the strongest influence.

Awareness & Alignment Prompts

1. Where did you first learn that you had to act differently to belong or stay safe?
2. What changed in you when you entered that space?
3. Who seemed to have more freedom than you did?
4. Who helped you make sense of what was happening, if anyone?

Additional Journal Prompts

1. What did an adult in your life seem to know, fear, or believe about the outside world before you understood it for yourself? How did they prepare you for it, if they did?
2. Think of a time when an institution, workplace, community, or authority failed to protect you or recognize your contribution. What did you begin to believe about yourself afterward?
3. Where have two or more systems pressed on you at once, such as money, gender, culture, religion, or a chain of command? What support was missing, and what did you have to carry alone?
4. Have you witnessed someone else being dismissed or harmed and felt unable to speak? What made silence feel safer in that moment, and what kind of witness would you want to be now?

EXERCISE 1

What Was Mine and What Was Structural

When something happens once, we may remember the event. When it happens repeatedly, we can begin building an identity around it.

I wasn't good enough.

I was difficult.

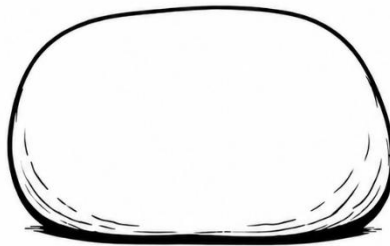
I should have tried harder.

I should have known better.

Something about me made this happen.

This exercise asks you to revisit one of those conclusions with information, perspective, and life experience you may not have had when you first formed it. The goal is not to remove your responsibility. It is to stop carrying responsibility that was never yours.

Look back at the Systemic Trauma Stones you checked in the introduction. Which one did you circle?



Name it: _____

Think of one experience that helped teach you that belief. You don't have to account for every time it happened. Choose one moment you can examine from where you stand now.

Then use this sequence:

1. What happened?
2. What did you believe it said about you?

3. What rules, resources, expectations, or power differences were operating around you?
4. What part of the situation was yours to own?
5. What belonged to the environment or to someone else's choices?
6. Knowing more now, how would you describe what happened?

Now widen the lens and zoom out from your personal perspective.

1. Is the system or condition that taught you this still present in your life? If so, what is still true about it, and what has changed?
2. What evidence supports this belief in your life today?
3. What evidence complicates or challenges it?
4. Where does this Stone still protect you from something that is true, and where might it be protecting you from something that is no longer happening?

What else was operating around you?

Consider policies, hierarchy, resources, cultural expectations, institutional practices, unwritten rules, power differences, or expectations about who you were supposed to be.

Then separate the two:

What genuinely belonged to me?

What belonged to the environment or system?

EXERCISE 2

When the Rules Changed

Sometimes a household has one set of rules and the world outside it has another. An adult may understand why those rules differ while a child only knows that something changed. The child may then make the difference mean something about themselves.

Choose one place outside your childhood home where you noticed the rules change. It could be a school, team, workplace, church, neighborhood, medical office, or another place you depended on. You do not need to map your entire childhood. Start with one experience.

Systems do not only shape what happens to us. They can also teach us rules for how to survive inside them.

A child doesn't think, *"I'm encountering an institutional hierarchy influenced by socioeconomic status, gender expectations, culture, race, religion, or power."*

Instead, they think:

Why can they do that and I can't?

Why didn't anyone protect me?

Why do I have to be different here?

What is wrong with me?

This exercise gives your adult understanding a chance to answer questions you may have once answered with blame toward yourself.

What I learned at home	What I encountered outside	What I believed it meant about me
What was I told, shown, or warned about?	What happened? Who was treated differently, and what rule seemed to apply?	What did I conclude before I had a fuller explanation?

What do I understand now that I could not understand then?

Which rule, if any, do I still carry into other places?

EXERCISE 3

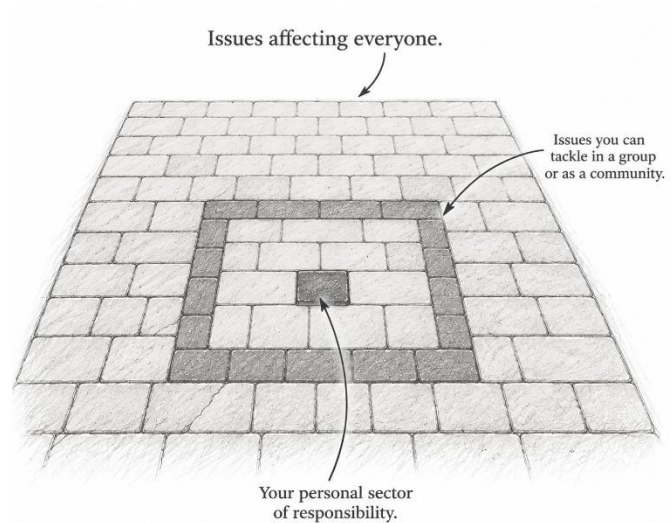
Your Square of Pavement

Some problems are so large that it can feel like anything we do is too small to matter.

But you don't have to repair the entire road.

You do have a square of pavement.

You can recognize what was done to you without spending the rest of your life defined by it. Awareness helps you see the pavement you inherited. This exercise asks you to decide what you will lay down on your square.



You are not responsible for repairing the entire road, but you are responsible for what you build, allow, and repeat on your square of pavement.

Where is your square?

- Home
- Work
- Family
- Community
- Faith
- Profession
- Other

1. Which rule or pattern from the earlier exercises do you see operating here?
2. What is one thing within your reach that you can stop repeating, change, or make safer for someone else?
3. What do you want someone else to learn about safety, worth, voice, or belonging because they crossed your square? What will exist because you are impacting this square?

This Chapter Was Intended to Help You...

...recognize that some of the beliefs you carry about yourself may have been shaped by the environments and systems you had to navigate.

You were asked to look at where you learned certain rules, what those rules required from you, and what you eventually made those experiences mean about yourself.

You were also asked to separate two things that can become tangled together: personal responsibility and structural influence.

Both can exist at the same time.

You can own the choices that were yours without owning someone else's behavior, an institution's failure, an unequal rule, or a system you did not create.

Most importantly, this chapter was not intended to leave you staring at everything that needs to change.

It was meant to help you find your square of pavement.

You may not be able to rebuild every system that taught you to shrink, stay quiet, work harder for the same belonging, or expect less protection.

But you can decide what happens on the ground you influence now.

What you repeat.

What you interrupt.

What you make safer.

And what you refuse to hand to the person walking behind you.