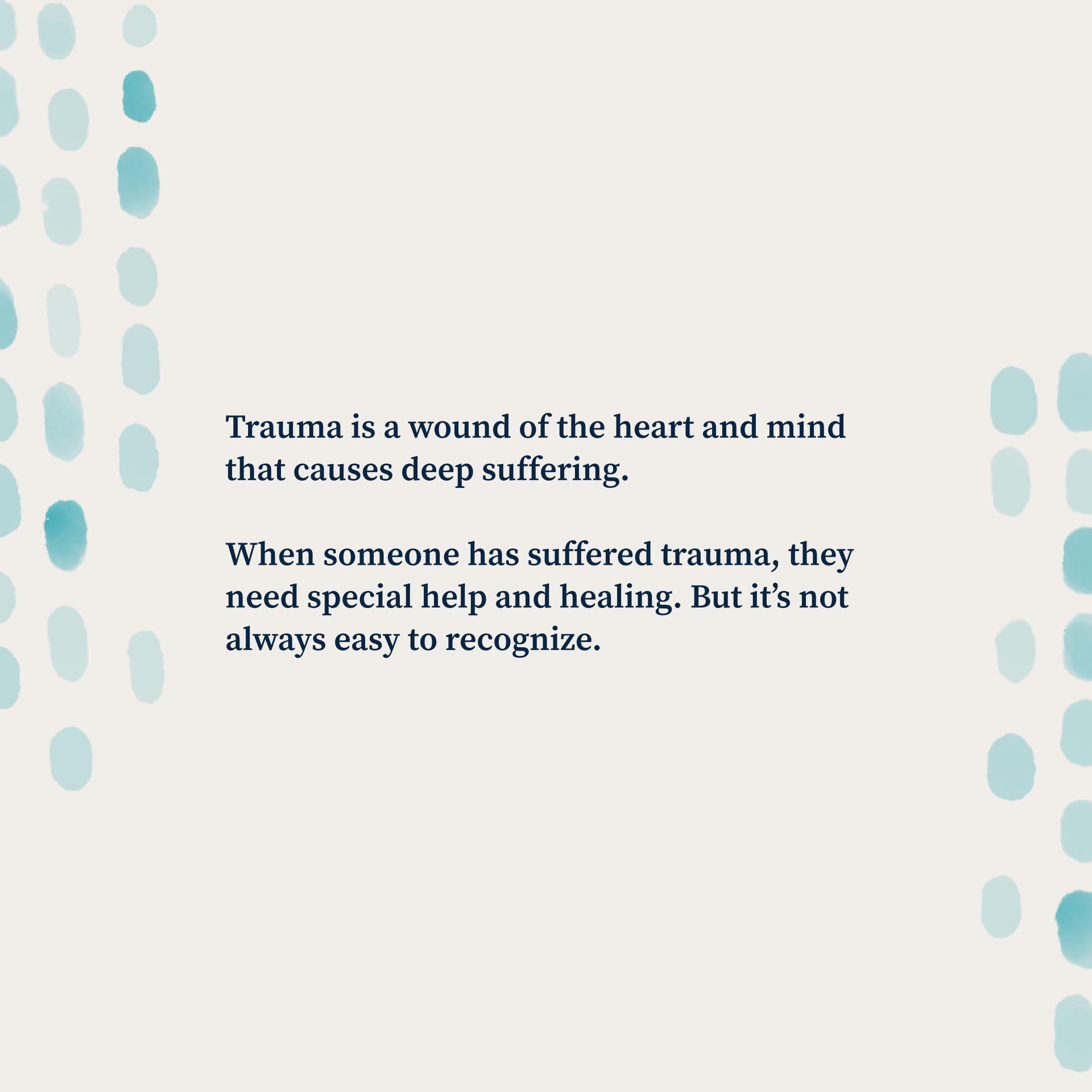




# Recognizing Trauma

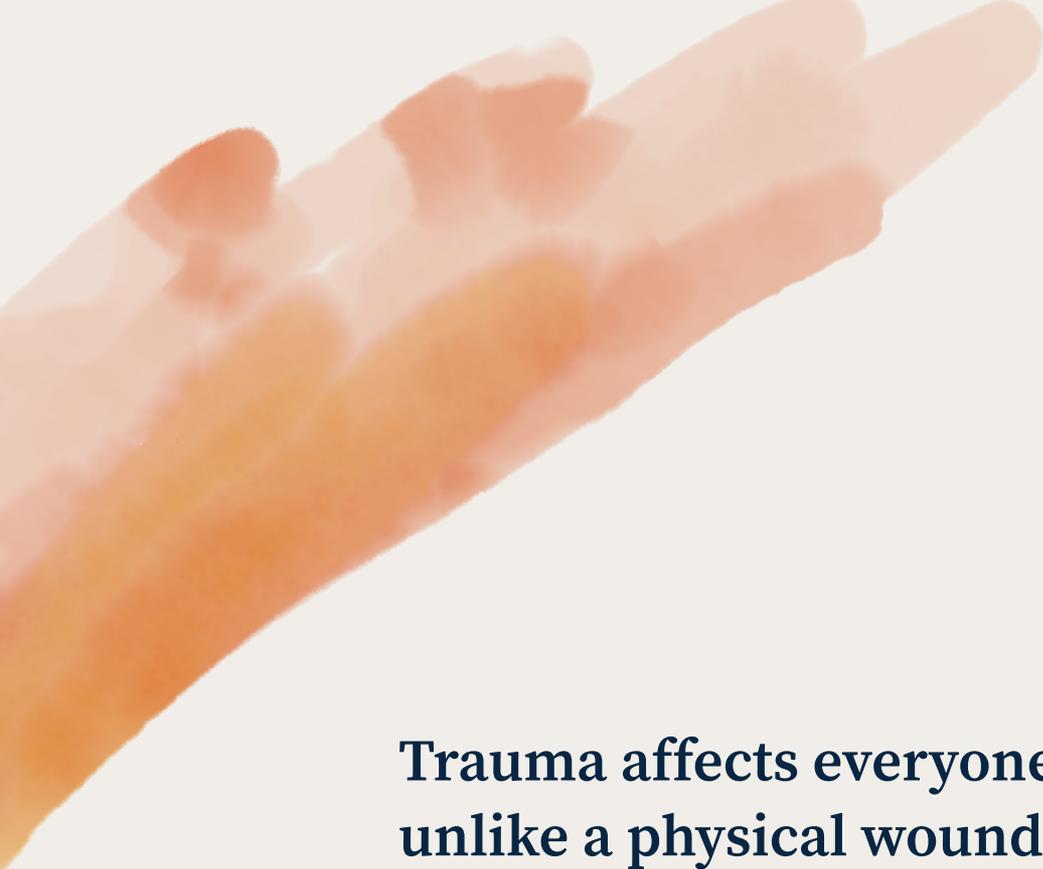
Things to know and ways to help





**Trauma is a wound of the heart and mind  
that causes deep suffering.**

**When someone has suffered trauma, they  
need special help and healing. But it's not  
always easy to recognize.**



**Trauma affects everyone differently. And unlike a physical wound, trauma can't be seen from the outside.**

**But there are three very common ways the pain of trauma affects people's minds, bodies, and spirits.**



# Reliving what happened

People who have suffered trauma often relive the experiences that hurt them. *Reliving* isn't the same as *remembering*. Reliving means someone's body and mind are experiencing the trauma again, even though it's not actually happening in the moment.

Someone who has experienced trauma might think or talk about what happened to them all the time. They might also experience flashbacks or nightmares about what happened. Reliving trauma makes it hard to concentrate.

# Reliving what happened

## One thing to know:

The experience of reliving a traumatic event can be like watching a video of the thing that happened.

Our attention to anything else fades, we feel the memory in our bodies and minds, and our brain is processing the memory as an event that is occurring right here, right now.

# Reliving what happened

**In the Bible, Job complains that God makes him relive his suffering:**

“I lie down and try to rest; I look for relief from my pain. But you—you terrify me with dreams; you send me visions and nightmares until I would rather be strangled than live in this miserable body.”

— Job 7:13-15 (GNT)

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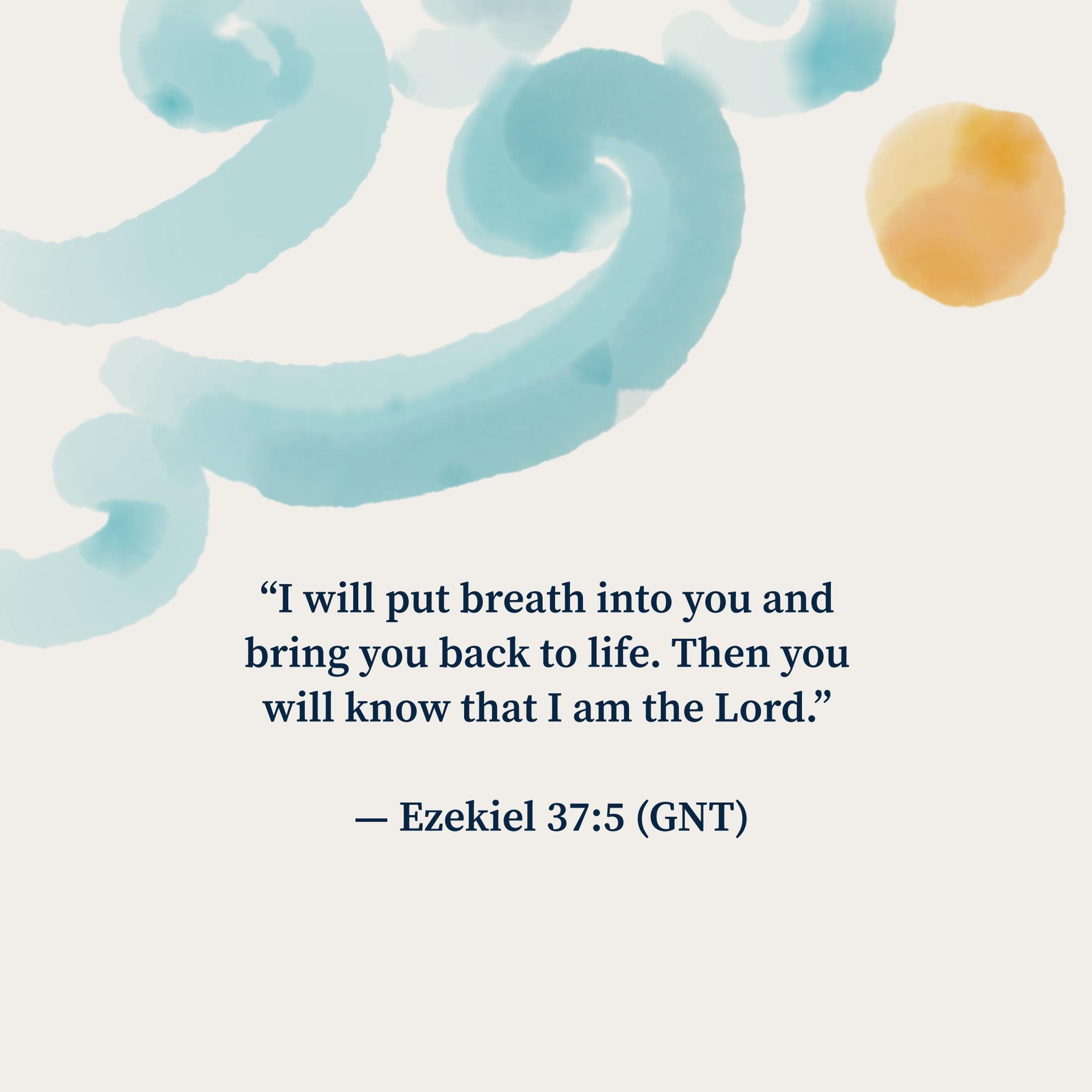
# Reliving what happened

## **One action that can help:**

Things that capture our attention can keep us grounded and help us feel safer. Comforting scents, tactile objects, and music are just a few things that use our five senses to keep us aware of the present moment.

Try feeling your feet on the ground, holding a small rock in your hand, or even watching a clock's second hand tick.

A large, irregular brushstroke in a light green color, located at the bottom of the page.

The background features abstract watercolor-style elements. On the left and top, there are several overlapping, swirling shapes in various shades of teal and light blue. On the right side, there is a single, circular shape in shades of orange and yellow, resembling a watercolor wash or a soft glow.

**“I will put breath into you and  
bring you back to life. Then you  
will know that I am the Lord.”**

**— Ezekiel 37:5 (GNT)**



## Avoiding reminders

People who have suffered trauma often avoid reminders of it. They may avoid people, places, and things that remind them of the experiences that hurt them. They might not even remember what happened — or they may use addictive substances and activities to numb and avoid their feelings.

It is normal for people who have been through trauma to refuse to talk about what happened, which leaves their feelings bottled up inside.





# Avoiding reminders

## **One thing to know:**

Emotions are a package deal. We cannot selectively block out certain feelings. When we avoid potentially frightening things, we simultaneously avoid having corrective, healing experiences and relationships as well.





# Avoiding reminders

**In the Bible, Job begs God to forget:**

“Turn that day into darkness, God.  
Never again remember that day; never again  
let light shine on it. Make it a day of gloom and  
thick darkness; cover it with clouds, and blot  
out the sun.”

— Job 3:4-5 (GNT)





# Avoiding reminders

## **One action that can help:**

Ask a friend or supportive person to tag along with you when you are in places that remind you of the place where the traumatic event occurred.

Or in the case of avoiding scary feelings, take time to write out or draw all of your feelings. It can help to see these things on a piece of paper because it helps us remember there are more than just scary feelings present, and that those feelings are not us, but something separate from us.





**“Do not be afraid, for  
I am with you.”**

**— Isaiah 43:5 (NIV)**





## Being on alert

People who have suffered trauma often feel on alert all the time. They can feel tense and jumpy, which makes them overreact to ordinary sounds or events. They might feel a sense of dread that another bad thing might happen.

Being on alert like this often gives people physical symptoms, like headaches, sleeplessness, stomachaches, or panic attacks.





# Being on alert

## **One thing to know:**

Our bodies are deeply affected by traumatic events. When we experience trauma, our bodies continue to keep watch for us — but this level of attention means that we don't physically rest the way we need to. Finding ways to regularly relax our bodies after trauma can help us rest and heal.



# Being on alert

**In the Bible, the Psalmist feels on alert:**

“I am terrified, and the terrors of death crush me. I am gripped by fear and trembling; I am overcome with horror. I wish I had wings like a dove. I would fly away and find rest.”

— Psalm 55:4-6 (GNT)



# Being on alert

## **One action that can help:**

Practicing a breathing or relaxation exercise for at least 10 minutes a day can help our bodies remember how to be “off duty,” which has positive long-term effects.

The more often we practice relaxing our bodies, the more fully we decrease moments of alertness and vigilance that so easily exhaust us.





**“The Lord is close to the  
brokenhearted and saves those  
who are crushed in spirit.”**

**— Psalm 34:18 (NIV)**





**The first step toward healing is to recognize the symptoms of trauma in yourself or in someone you love. The healing journey is a process that takes time.**

**Wherever there is trauma, healing is always possible. God feels our pain with us, and God wants to help us heal.**



For more simple ideas about how to  
offer gentle care for others and work  
toward healing for yourself, visit  
[traumahealingbasics.org](https://traumahealingbasics.org).

