When trauma happened over and over

Understanding the effects of prolonged or early trauma.

Some trauma is a single event. Some goes on for months or years, often in childhood or in a relationship that was hard to leave. When trauma is repeated and there is no escape, its effects can reach further.

As well as the usual trauma reactions, you may notice

Strong, fast-changing feelings
Emotions that go from nought to a hundred, or a shut-down numbness. Difficulty calming down once upset.

A harsh view of yourself
Deep shame, feeling worthless, different or damaged. A sense that it was your fault.

Difficulty with closeness
Finding it hard to trust or feel safe with people. Expecting to be hurt or left. Keeping distance, or holding on tight.

Why

A child, or anyone trapped, has to adapt to survive. Staying on guard, shutting off feelings, blaming yourself, pleasing others, keeping people at arm's length: each of these was a sensible solution to an impossible situation. The trouble is that they carry on long after the situation has changed.

These are ways of coping that you learned. They do not mean there is something wrong with you.

How therapy usually goes

Feeling safer and steadier	Understanding your reactions. Building skills for strong feelings and for staying in the present. A reliable relationship with your therapist.
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Working with what happened	When you are ready, making sense of memories so they lose their grip.
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Living more fully	Relationships, work, identity, and the things that matter to you now.

The phases overlap, and there is no fixed timetable. The work goes best at a pace that keeps you inside your window of tolerance.

> **Note**
> What happened to you was not your fault. The ways you learned to cope are how you got through it.

My notes and questions

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