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Why Childhood Trauma Can Lead to PTSD, and How Tapping Can Help

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There's a common understanding, even in "pop" psychology, that childhood trauma can have devastating and lasting effects on a person's wellness. It often sets a dysfunctional precedent for how they conduct and think about themselves well into adulthood. While we've long understood this from a psychological perspective, the biology behind it hasn't always been clear. Interestingly, new research is shining a light on just why this is.

My good friend Dr. Dawson Church recently informed me about [a groundbreaking study](#) published in the respected journal *Nature Neuroscience* that was conducted by Dr. Moshe Szyf at McGill University. Szyf is a renowned professor and pioneer in the field of epigenetics, the study of how external factors influence genes. The study revealed that adults who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder are more likely to have experienced trauma as a child. More specifically, this is due to the absence of a gene labeled FKBP5, which aids in the regulation of stress hormones. Childhood trauma can reduce the presence of this gene in relation to your stress hormones, placing you at higher risk for PTSD if you encounter trauma later in your life.

It's a fascinating revelation, but not altogether surprising.

Although the field of energy medicine has been derided by many in the Western medical establishment, the intimate relationship between emotional buildup and physiological function has been a given in Eastern holistic medicine for centuries now. In the modality I work with, Emotional Freedom Techniques (commonly known as EFT or simply "tapping"), these insights -- specifically as expressed through traditional Chinese medicine -- are combined with much of what we've learned through Western psychotherapy. The result is an effective method of self-therapy that can help people address both the stresses that plague them today and the trauma inflicted in them as children.

For those of us who practice EFT, we've seen firsthand how PTSD and other adult anxiety disorders are so often a more devastating manifestation of a latent trauma someone has experienced in childhood. I tend to think of trauma as an onion, with layers upon layers upon even more layers of issues. Addressing and relieving someone's current misery almost always reveals a more disruptive level of stress and discomfort buried deeper beneath. That science is revealing this structure also exists in our genes is proof of what many mental health workers -- not just those who work with EFT -- have known for some time now.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a condition that is most commonly associated with war veterans, but according to the National Institute of Mental Health, the term applies to any chronic anxiety that people experience after "seeing or living through a dangerous event." In our modern world, that covers a wide spectrum of situations, everything from car accidents to school shootings. Any insight into what makes such a large number of people who live through these events suffer from PTSD has the potential to help so many.

Dr. Church himself recently conducted [research](#) that has shown how helpful EFT can be in addressing PTSD. The findings were published in the Feb. 1, 2013 edition of the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. In a randomized control trial, veterans suffering with PTSD were split into two groups: one that went through therapy in addition to six sessions of EFT coaching, and another that received traditional therapy alone. At the end of the study, 90 percent of those that used EFT no longer exhibited symptoms of PTSD, while only 4 percent of those in the other group experienced any significant relief from the disorder.

EFT is one of the most effective healing therapies I know of because it's so elegantly and deceptively simple: Once you learn how to "tap" -- [which you can do right here](#) -- you can freely and easily use it as your self-therapy tool to address all manner of personal issues. With a condition as serious as PTSD, I do generally advise that people begin with a practitioner, or if they do choose to use EFT on their own, they should be prepared to see one should the emotions that surface become too difficult to bear. Either way, it can have positively life-changing results in very little time.

The takeaway from Dr. Szyf's findings is larger than any one healing modality, however. The simple and undeniable truth now reflected to us in our very genes is that our feelings are intricately connected with our physiology and must be considered when we encounter any kind of distress, be it emotional or physical. We must address our entire being if we truly hope to heal.

Nick Ortner is the CEO of [The Tapping Solution](#) and author of [The Tapping Solution: A Revolutionary System for Stress-Free Living](#), a new book on EFT which will be published by Hay House on April 2, 2013.

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