

What is Trauma?

Trauma is an emotional and physiological response to a deeply distressing experience or series of events that impacts an individual's sense of safety, trust, and well-being in lasting and personal ways.

Common Responses to Identity Theft

Victims may experience:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Hypervigilance
- Irritability
- Intrusive thoughts
- Avoidance behaviors,
- Difficulty trusting others or managing daily stressors.

Repeated incidents of identity theft, such as ongoing credit issues or additional breaches, along with prolonged resolution processes can result in complex trauma, compounding emotional harm and eroding a person's sense of safety and stability.

Identity Theft as Trauma

Identity theft isn't just a financial or legal issue – it can be a **deeply traumatic experience**. Victims often describe feeling violated, exposed, and powerless, with **emotional and psychological** effects that can linger long after the incident is resolved. By viewing identity theft through a **trauma-informed lens**, we can better support victims in healing, not just recovering their accounts.

Access trauma-informed resources through our mental health partners at giveanhour.org.

What Makes ID Theft Traumatic

- **Loss of control:** Victims often lose access to their finances, reputation, and sense of safety, all without warning.
- **Invisibility of the crime:** The perpetrator is usually unknown and faceless, creating an ongoing sense of threat.
- **Prolonged stress:** Unlike a one-time event, identity theft can have long-lasting consequences as victims face repeated fallout over months or even years.
- **System Failure:** Victims may feel let down or even betrayed by institutions meant to protect them, which can damage trust in banks, credit agencies, and even law enforcement.

Connection is Key

Circles of support provide identity theft victims with emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of connection that helps restore trust and resilience during recovery.

Recovery is a Process

The humanizing role of simple validation, especially in systems where victims are routinely dismissed or shamed can have a profound impact on healing and recovery.

Supporters can acknowledge and empower identity theft victims on their healing journey in many ways:

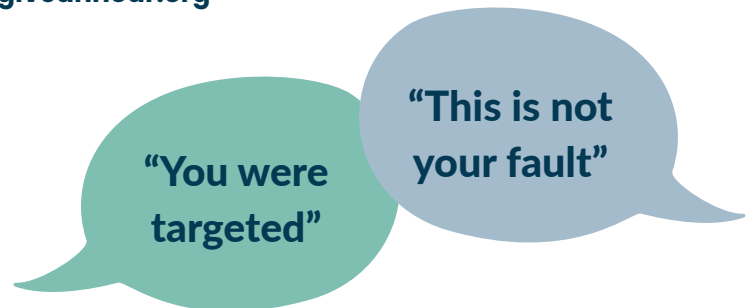
- Validate Their Reactions
- Support Emotional Grounding Techniques
- Reinforce They Are Not to Blame (*You didn't lose money - it was stolen*)
- Reinforce That Healing Takes Time
- Encourage Self-Compassion
- Normalize Seeking Support Without Shame

Person-Centered Care

Trauma-informed care recognizes that **recovery isn't just about fixing the problem** - it's about restoring dignity, choice, and control. Supporting identity theft victims with this lens can make a meaningful difference in their healing journey.

Supporters should prioritize **empathy, validate** the victim's feelings, avoid minimizing their experience, and offer practical resources while respecting the person's pace and boundaries.

Learn more about the trauma-informed approach at giveanhour.org



Responding with Support

- Offer empathy, patience, and a **non-judgmental** presence.
- Validate their feelings and experiences without minimizing or rushing their emotions.
- Focus on active listening and **avoid offering unsolicited advice** or making assumptions about what they need.
- Encourage small, manageable next steps and **provide practical resources** if welcomed.
- Always respect the person's pace, boundaries, and choices, understanding that regaining a sense of **safety and control takes time**.
- Above all, let them know **they are not alone**.
- You're not alone. The Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) offers free, confidential help.

<https://www.idtheftcenter.org/recover/>