TRAUMA

What's wrong with me?

- Often, I feel numb, except when I do dangerous things.
- My husband beats me when he's stressed. I'm afraid to tell anyone. I don't want people to know this happens to me. I'm afraid it will make it worse.
- My uncle forced me to have sex. He said he'd hurt me if I told anyone. I still feel so ashamed.
- I don't let other people get to know me well. I think they'll see that I'm not worth anything

- My mother yells at me a lot. She says I'll never be anything and no one will ever want me
- Sometimes I think about suicide.
- I feel really stressed a lot, so I take drugs to cope. I feel better when I'm high.
- Clear memories of being abused when I was young sometimes suddenly come to mind. I try to push them away, but it doesn't work.

What is it?

- The threat can be physical, emotional or psychological. It can be a serious threat to one's body, sense of self, safety or well-being (including serious neglect)
- Trauma may have occurred recently or a long time ago. Regardless, it may affect you your whole life until you get help

- Fears of COVID-19 harming you or people you love can be traumatic if you feel you can't do anything to stay safe.
- REMEMBER: Something bad happening to you does not make you bad or worthless!

What are the effects of trauma?

Trauma can:

- affect the way your brain is 'wired' so that you're always on the alert for danger or else shut down to protect yourself from additional hurt.
- affect your ability to concentrate, plan or problem-solve
- leave you feeling like you don't matter, you're worthless, or not as good as other people.
- leave you feeling like you're disconnected from yourself, your body, or like you have almost no feelings or memories at all.
- cause difficulty sleeping, nightmares or flashbacks (flashbacks are memories that feel like things that happened in the past are happening now in the present)
- affect your behaviour, such as having angry outbursts, poor self-control, taking risks including abusing substances.
- affect your relationships, such as lacking trust or fear of getting close to people.

What can I do about it?

- Talk with someone you trust.
- Remember that just trying to make thoughts go away doesn't work. Your brain is wired to be on guard for another threat and to be ready to protect you because of what you learned about danger.
- If possible find a counsellor or someone who understands about trauma. Due to COVID you may need to do this over the phone or text.
- Remember that having had bad things happen to you doesn't mean that YOU are bad or worthless.
- Learn to pay attention to feelings in your body, like when you feel afraid and your heart pounds, your breathing goes fast, or your stomach gets upset.
- Know that it is possible to 'rewire' your brain.
- Notice what your body feels like when you are relaxed and comfortable.
- When you feel upset or afraid, pay attention to your breathing and slow it down.
- Rather than trying to just push uncomfortable feelings away, find strategies that help you feel better and calm in your body (e.g. talking a walk, listening to music, praying, talking with a trusted friend).