

Received: 02/10/2025

Accepted: 20/10/2025

Keywords:

Trauma, Recovery

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.17868/strath.00094528>

Book Review

The Trauma Recovery Handbook: A Model for Navigating Recovery for Professionals, Parents and Carers

By Betsy de Thierry

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

ISBN: 978-1-80501-202-3

Year of Publication: 2025

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Betsy de Thierry's name is well known in complex/developmental trauma circles. She's written a number of prominent books on attachment, trauma, and related ideas, and so I was excited to have the opportunity to review her most recent publication. Given her previous books, and the ever-expanding range of publications, YouTube videos, blogs and vlogs about trauma (by de Thierry herself and many others), I wondered what new content or insights might await me in this book.

The first thing that seemed notable to me was the title, *The Trauma Recovery Handbook: A Model for Navigating Recovery for Professionals, Parents and Carers*. Amongst all my previous reading and learning about developmental trauma, I've found many resources which explain what trauma is, how it occurs, how it can be expressed in children's behaviour, and even how we might address those behaviours if they're deemed unhelpful or inappropriate; but I've rarely seen something so explicitly focused on the idea of *recovery*.

It was also interesting to note the clear identification of the audience for the book – this is not a 'self-help' type book aimed at adults seeking to recover from trauma they have experienced themselves, but at adults seeking to support others who have experienced trauma – especially children. The book is aimed at the professionals who 'hold the hands of those who hold the hand of the child' (Independent Care Review, 2020, p.20), as well as the parents/carers doing the more direct handholding.



This dual audience is also reflected in the structure of the book, which is presented in four sections. The chapters in the first two sections conclude with two sets of reflective questions, one for 'parents/carers/therapeutic mentors', and one for 'therapists', recognising the different perspectives within this broad hand-holding audience. These sections focus firstly on 'foundations'; that is, the basic understanding readers need to have before engaging with the remainder of the text. This includes highlighting the importance of those relationships and environments which can promote healing and recovery. The focus of the second section is 'general areas of impact', including the impact of trauma in areas such as the body, emotions, memory, and relationships. Within the chapters specific to different areas of impact are suggested techniques for 'in the moment' supports when trauma-driven responses occur; relaxation techniques are included in the section on impacts on body (p.156) and mind (p.196), for example, while ways to release anger are included in the chapter on emotions (p.174). This is an engaging and relatable way to present this information.

The third section of the book looks at different types of 'events' which may be experienced as traumatic, such as abuse and neglect. It was helpful and reassuring to see sections on medical and organisational traumas included here, since discussions of developmental trauma often focus on abuse and neglect, and less on other circumstances which can contribute to childhood trauma experiences. However, the chapters on emotional neglect and collective trauma are extremely short and mainly replicate content from de Thierry's previous books on these topics (2021, 2023). I would have liked to see a little more content in these chapters, rather than the implication that readers would have the wherewithal to access these other titles. Relatedly, the frequent use of extended quotes from de Thierry's previous publications was the one element of this book that I found a little jarring.

The fourth and final section of the book describes de Thierry's 'trauma recovery focused model' (TRFM®), which is mentioned throughout the book alongside several of the 'tools' which are part of the model. The section begins with an overview of the different professions which may be involved in supporting recovery from trauma; de Thierry is clear that recovery requires professional support and is not something that can be properly achieved by parents and carers alone. She presents the information in this section as useful to have 'as you wait for help'. While I agree that parents and carers should not be expected to take on the role of mental health professionals for their own children, access to help for care experienced children, who have often experienced developmental trauma, is known to be problematic (Education Committee, 2016; Kirkman, 2019), and not always in keeping with the child's individual needs and recovery journey, which their primary caregivers are uniquely attuned to. The model has four stages, and the importance of a foundational relationship with an adult whom the child considers safe and trustworthy is recognised in the first two, which focus on safety, hope, stability, and emotional regulation.



Professional input is, however, recommended for the final two stages, which include processing and integrating symptoms, thoughts, and memories to progress towards recovery. From a practical perspective, I wondered how realistic this is for many of the children (and adults) who are on a trauma recovery journey.

Overall, much of this book is unsurprisingly familiar to anyone who has previous learning about developmental trauma. There are sections on concepts such as attachment, trauma types, shame, and their developmental impacts, and these foundational concepts build carefully towards the useful overview of the TRFM®. What is particularly helpful is the way in which these complex and inter-related topics are introduced, explained, and structured. For readers who are just beginning to learn about developmental trauma, the book is a good introduction, while going into a degree of detail in some areas which are overlooked in other books on trauma, and with a welcome focus on recovery.

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About the review author

Leanne is a research associate at CELCIS, with interests in adoption experiences, and the education of care experienced learners. She is also a therapeutic parent.

The publisher, Jessica Kingsley Publishing, supplied a copy of this book for review.

