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# HEALING GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

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Interrupting and Stopping the Cycle

June 2023



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## MISSION OF CPLA

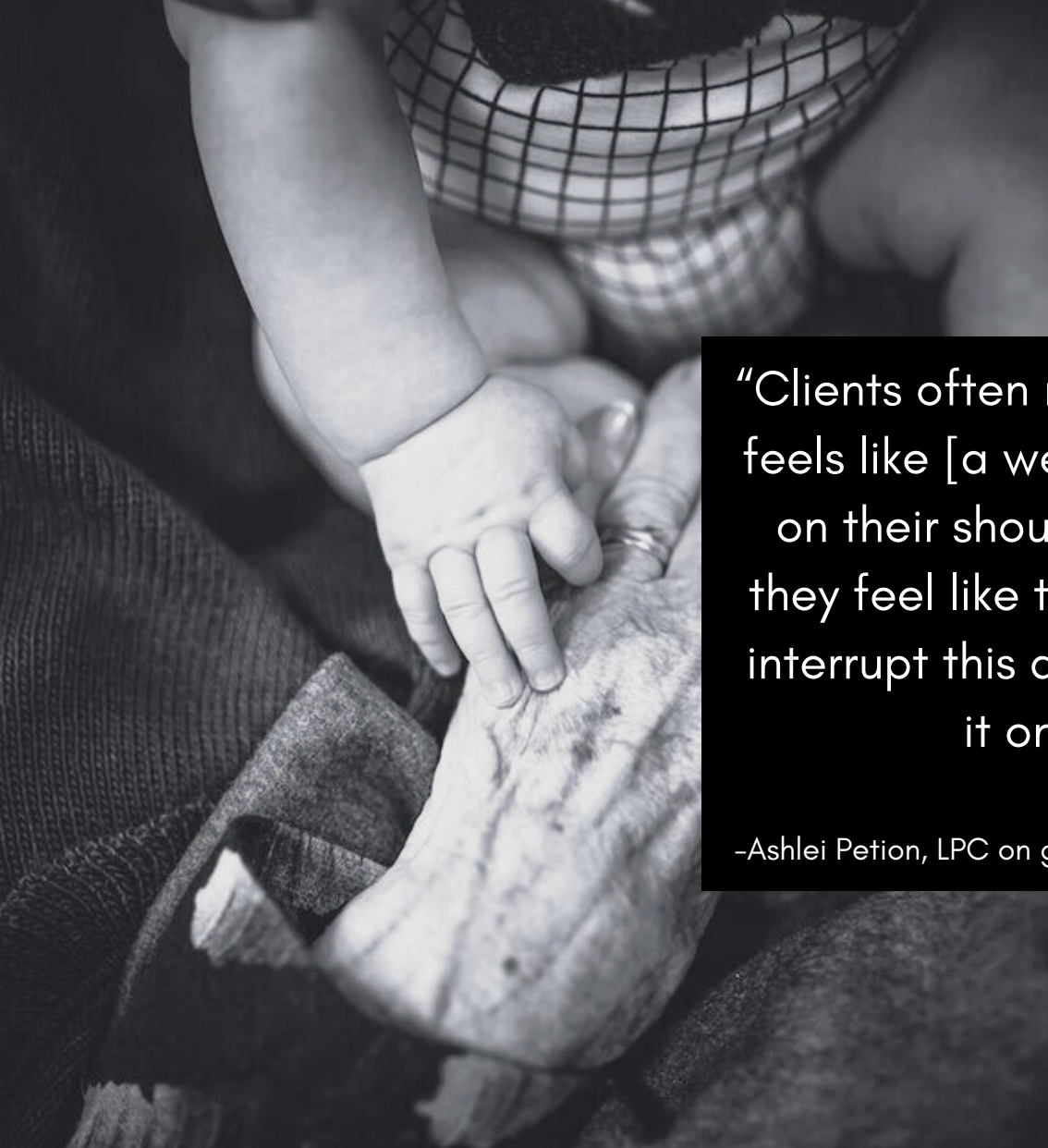
The mission of Counseling Partners of Los Angeles is to support at-risk and under-served students living in Los Angeles by providing a low-cost, school-based program that delivers essential counseling and support services students need in order to grow toward their full potential emotionally, intellectually, morally and socially.

## Interested in counseling for your child?

CPLA's counseling services are FREE to all students attending one of our partner schools! Reach out to the school principal or your child's teacher or request a CPLA referral form from the school.

Follow CPLA on Instagram for more helpful information

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“Clients often report that it feels like [a weight] sitting on their shoulders...and they feel like they need to interrupt this and not pass it on.”

-Ashlei Petion, LPC on generational trauma

## WHAT IS GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

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Most would characterize trauma as a single event that overtaxes one's ability to cope. While this is true, there are other types of trauma. One of the most overlooked types is generational trauma, which can be defined by patterns of experiences and resulting behavior that are passed down through families as a result of traumatic events. Some examples include systemic oppression including slavery, racism, genocide, and intrafamilial abuse.

Those in individual therapy often believe the symptoms they are experiencing - shame, depression, anxiety, low self-worth, among other feelings - are a result of personal problems. They do not see that their presenting issues may be connected back to the traumas their ancestors experienced.

Some signs that generational trauma may be present are the following:

- Strong emotions such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and shame which are common amongst those who experience a single traumatic event
- Fear and distrust of others
- Unprocessed or unacknowledged shame and silence around certain family issues

# COMMON TYPES OF GENERATIONAL TRAUMA: SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND RACISM

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Oppressed minority groups and marginalized communities such as Latinx, Asian, Black, and Native American communities have faced significant trauma at the hands of those in power. This trauma can be traced through the generations and found manifest in legitimate reactions by descendants today. Such reactions may include fear of medical care or law enforcement. Another salient example is that descendants of those who survived the Holocaust have significantly higher rates of stress disorders, according to Rachel Yehuda of Mount Sinai Hospital.

Internalized shame from pervading cultural messages through the generations is also a source of generational trauma. Such racist, sexist, or homophobic cultural messages impact how families see and orient themselves in society. Children may grow up with lowered self-esteem, confidence, and worth as a result of these cultural messages and pass this on to their own children.

You can explore generational trauma by asking yourself where problematic feelings originate. If they have been internalized from your community or family members without you having had a direct experience with the source of the trauma, it might be a trauma that has been passed down to you by your immediate community or family members.

## How to heal

One should consider working with a trained therapist if they would like to heal generational trauma. Some techniques that your therapist could use are family timelines, genograms (which are outlines of a family's structure), guided imagery, boundary setting, and narrative therapy, which all help you identify the trauma and learn to cope with its aftereffects on both the body and the mind.

It is important to note that healing happens in community, because the trauma first occurred in the context of community. Healing trauma is at best a process whereby the therapist lets you lead and you have social supports in place. The goal is to make changes in your own life for the here and now and also for the future. Counseling is a way that one can have their experiences validated and legitimized, and to connect with the traumatized generations before them and bring hope to those who will come after them. If you are interested in counseling for your child, please reach out to their school for a referral form. We are here to help you stop the cycle.

Generational trauma "can be a biological thing, an emotional thing, a social thing. ... Trauma changes our chemistry; it can change how we interact with other people, ... who we are and even our gene expressions....[but] counseling offers the space to relearn that [and] a space where clients are heard and validated."

–Ashlei Petion, LPC

Resources used:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/aug/21/study-of-holocaust-survivors-finds-trauma-passed-on-to-childrens-genes>  
<https://ct.counseling.org/2023/01/generational-trauma-uncovering-and-interrupting-the-cycle/#>