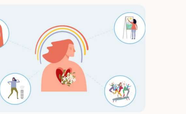
4 Alternative Therapies for Trauma That Reach Beyond Traditional Talk Therapy



By Kayla Gill | Updated December 19, 2025

1. Somatic Healing
2. Mindfulness-Based Treatments
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Trauma Recovery on Your Own Terms

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Healing from trauma is complicated, and nonlinear. Symptoms can last for years after you get to safety—and they can change over time. What comforts you on a Monday may be triggering on Tuesday. It can be frustrating to feel like you're not healing fast enough, even when you're actively trying to get better.

That frustration can be valuable, if you let it motivate you. Healing is, in part, the process of getting to know yourself again. And in rehab for trauma, you can achieve that in any number of ways. You might even experiment with different forms of treatment, until you find the ones that work best for you. These non-traditional therapies can be powerful components of your recovery.

1. Somatic Healing

Emotional trauma impacts physical health.[1] Research even links childhood trauma to heart disease in adults. As a result, experts believe that body-based therapies can support emotional recovery from trauma.[2] One study reported that these treatments are "more effective for trauma than currently used cognitive (Top-down") and exposure therapies."

Somatic therapies—or body-based therapies—focus on the mind-body connection. Treatments help you address the trauma stored in both your brain and your body, at the same time.

Bodywork

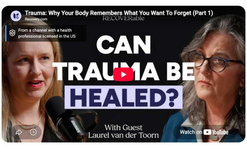
Studies show that receiving safe, healthy touch can help you process traumatic experiences.[3] For example, massage and other types of bodywork may help people heal from the emotional impact of sexual assault.

Trauma and Tension Release Exercises (TRE)

These exercises help patients let go of physical and emotional tension. During a session, you'll shake your body in a safe, gentle way. Experts say that TRE mimics the natural feelings of shaking in response to trauma.[4] And that sensation can "relieve tension, reduce hyper vigilance" and increase feelings of well-being. If you'd like to try TRE, make sure you learn it from a trained practitioner. Once you're comfortable with the exercises, you can also use them as a type of self-care.

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)

Also called tapping, EFT teaches patients to tap on acupressure points to relieve stress.[5] Studies show that emotional freedom technique relieves trauma symptoms, sometimes completely.[6] EFT can also treat clinical depression and anxiety.[7]



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2. Mindfulness-Based Treatments

Mindfulness helps with emotion regulation, which is a common issue for trauma survivors.[8] This umbrella term refers to a variety of techniques. Some rehabs offer yoga classes, and others teach you how to meditate. But this approach isn't right for everyone.

If you have a history of trauma, mindfulness can be triggering. As psychotherapist and trauma researcher David A. Treleaven writes, some patients find "meditation can actually end up exacerbating symptoms of traumatic stress."[9] Researchers caution that mindfulness techniques can "destabilize clients who are particularly prone to flashbacks, rumination, or easily triggered trauma memories."[10]

What works for you might trigger someone else. If you'd like to try healing through mindfulness, make sure to get professional support. These techniques aren't right for everyone, but some patients find them extremely helpful.

Meditation

Data supports meditation as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[11] This spiritual practice also has physical health benefits.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

According to experts in mindfulness at Brown University, MBCT "combines training in mindfulness meditation practices with principles from cognitive therapy."[12] Whether you attend 1:1 or group sessions of MBCT, your therapist will guide you through meditations and cognitive exercises.[13] You may also have homework between sessions. MBCT can treat the symptoms of PTSD.[14]

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

In many ways, this therapy is similar to MBCT. For example, you'll likely go through treatment with a group. But instead of using cognitive therapy, patients learn a wider variety of mindfulness techniques. After about 6 weeks of MBSR, patients go on a brief meditation retreat.[15] Experts agree that these mindfulness exercises can relieve trauma symptoms.[16]

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3. Non-Traditional Talk Therapy

Mindfulness teaches you to focus on the present moment. Other treatments help you understand the past. In some types of talk therapy, patients learn to live with traumatic events. You might describe or even re-experience your most difficult memories. The goal is not to trigger you, but to help you process what happened.

Psychodynamic Therapy

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), "psychodynamic therapy focuses on the psychological roots of emotional suffering."[17] Patients work closely with a therapist to get to the root of their symptoms. Short-term psychodynamic therapy includes a finite number of 1:1 sessions.[18] Some therapists recommend a much longer treatment program. In that case, you'll spend the first few sessions free associating, as your therapist gets to know you. Psychodynamic therapy can help with PTSD and related conditions, including addiction.[19]

Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET)

By telling your story, you can take control of it. During NET, patients tell the stories of their lives.[20] You'll focus on traumatic memories, and also talk about some positive ones. Your therapist guides you to re-experience painful emotions, but stay in touch with the present moment.

Inner Child Work

This treatment is just what it sounds like—recognizing that a version of your younger self lives on within you. There are countless ways to connect with your inner child.[21] For example, you could write them a letter. You can also meditate, picture their face, and start a conversation. It can be especially helpful to ask them simple questions, like "how do you feel?" or "what do you need to feel safe?" This work can bring up repressed feelings and even memories. If you're new to recovery, it's best to embark on inner child work with a guide, like a therapist or other professional.

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4. Creative Therapies

Talk therapy can be central to recovery. But it's not the only way to heal. Creative pursuits help patients unlock deeper emotions and repressed memories. They can also help you release physical, emotional, and even spiritual pain. These therapies empower you to express yourself, working through trauma in the process.

Art Therapy

In art therapy, you'll create visual art as a way of connecting with your feelings. Sessions may take place 1:1 or in a group setting. By sharing your creations with other people—including your therapist—you practice self-expression. If you enjoy making art, this can become a healthy coping mechanism in the long term. Art can also help you externalize traumatic memories, making it easier to live with them.[22]

Music Therapy

Music therapy can alleviate many symptoms of PTSD.[23] According to experts, it's especially helpful for addressing "negative affect and mood alterations." Because it has such an emotional impact, listening to or playing music may help you regulate your feelings. It can even help outside of therapy sessions. For example, listening to a happy song might help you calm down after being triggered.

Dance Movement Therapy

Experts write that dance therapy "enhances resilience" in trauma survivors.[24] There are several reasons for this. For example, dance helps people feel whole by including the body in the process of emotional recovery. As a result, it may reduce dissociative symptoms for people with PTSD. Dance can also build up your confidence. This encourages patients to find joy in the process of healing.

Trauma Recovery on Your Own Terms

Living through trauma changes you. You probably won't ever return to who you were before. But there's always a way forward. Recovery is the process of finding the path that works best for you, and takes you exactly where you need to go. With the right kind of treatment, you can build a life you love. And you get to decide what that means.

You Are Not Alone

Mental health struggles can feel isolating, but compassionate care is within reach. Browse our comprehensive list of inpatient mental health facilities and residential treatment centers for depression, trauma, anxiety, and more. Healing is possible; find mental health help for yourself or a loved one today.

FAQs

Q: What alternative therapies have research support for trauma symptoms?

Q: Can mindfulness meditation help with trauma symptoms?

Q: Is there clinical evidence that yoga benefits people with PTSD?

Q: Do creative arts therapies (like art, drama, or music) help with trauma symptoms?

Q: How strong is the research evidence for alternative trauma therapies overall?

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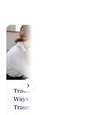

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What Is the 13th Step in AA? 6 Ways to Protect Yourself and Your Recovery



By Kayla Gill | Updated September 18, 2025
Clinically Reviewed by Dr. Mateeri Chaudhary-Malgeri, Ph.D.

What Is the 13th Step?
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Recovery should be a place where you feel safe, supported, and respected. Unfortunately, some people in recovery groups experience unwanted romantic or sexual advances from other members. This behavior is often called the "13th step," and it's important to know that it's never okay.

If someone has made you uncomfortable in a recovery setting, you're not alone. Many people have experienced this, and it's not your fault. If you're new to recovery, being aware of this unfortunately common pattern can help you recognize problematic behavior and take steps to protect yourself and your healing process.

Remember: You have the right to feel secure and respected in any recovery space—your safety and ability to continue healing matter most. Let's take a closer look at what the 13th step is, why it happens, and how to stay safe while getting the support you deserve.

What Is the 13th Step?

The "13th step" isn't an official part of AA's 12-Step program. It's a term that describes when someone with more recovery time pursues a romantic or sexual relationship with a newcomer to the program. This typically involves someone who has been sober for months or years approaching someone in their first few weeks or months of recovery.

The key issue is the difference in recovery experience and the power that comes with it. Someone who has been in recovery longer often has more influence in the group and may be seen as a role model. This dynamic can make it very difficult for newcomers to say no to advances, even when they want to.

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Understanding 13th-Stepping Behavior

Even when "13th stepping" isn't intentionally predatory, it can still be harmful because of the power dynamics involved.

People who are new to recovery are in an especially vulnerable place. Early recovery is often marked by emotional instability, low self-esteem, and difficulty setting healthy boundaries.[4] A lot of newcomers are also dealing with damaged relationships from their past and may be socially isolated.

People with seniority in recovery programs often hold informal authority within their groups. When someone in this position shows romantic interest, it can feel flattering at first. But it also creates pressure that someone newer to the group may not feel prepared to handle. Even with good intentions, pursuing someone in early recovery takes advantage of their vulnerable state and can seriously harm their healing process.

Thirteenth-stepping is woefully common. Investigative reporter and founder of the The 13th Step podcast Lauren Chooljian, who led a 3-year investigation into predatory conduct by the founder of one support group in New Hampshire, points how just how well-known this practice is:

> If you've never heard this phrase before, it's likely that you're not in recovery. Because people in recovery will tell you this is just the most common thing. I had someone tell me that they heard it first in the '70s. In the history of addiction treatment, you'll see it right there with the adoption of Alcoholics Anonymous. It's a thing that has been around, but a lot of us haven't been paying enough attention to see it.
>
> — Lauren Chooljian, The 13th Step Podcast

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The Risks and Dangers of 13th Stepping

Early recovery requires intense focus on healing and building new life skills. Romantic relationships, especially complicated ones, can pull attention and energy away from this critical work. The excitement or stress of a new relationship can become a distraction when your brain and emotions are already dealing with the challenges of early sobriety.[7]

Increased Stress and Relapse Risk

Even good relationships involve work and can be consuming at times. But relationships with unhealthy dynamics can be downright draining. Romantic relationships have a way of triggering our most deeply held wounds. Dr. Sue Johnson, a clinical psychologist and developer of emotionally focused therapy (EFT) for couples, explains in her book *Hold Me Tight*:[8]

> Our past history with loved ones shapes our present relationships. In moments of disconnection when we cannot safely engage with our lover, we naturally turn to the way of coping that we adopted as a child, the way of coping that allowed us to hold on to our parent, at least in some minimal way.
>
> — Sue Johnson, Clinical Psychologist and Author

This activation can often be a profound opportunity for healing. But in early recovery, it can all be too much. Heightened tensions and emotions can be relapse triggers, and breakups can truly disrupt your recovery process.

Loss of Safe Spaces

When someone in your recovery group pursues you romantically, it can make meetings uncomfortable or even unsafe. You might feel like you can't say no without losing your place in the group. Some people end up leaving their support system entirely to avoid an uncomfortable situation, which cuts them off from crucial recovery resources.

Risk of Harm

In some cases, 13th stepping involves more serious boundary violations or even assault. The informal structure of many recovery groups can make it difficult to report problems or hold people accountable for predatory behavior or sexual misconduct.

Chooljian reports that while we often think of recovery as taking place in active drug addiction,

> We don't talk as often about, once substance abuse has ended, it doesn't mean your brain is back to normal and everything's fine, your life's back in order. You're basically finding out who you are all over again. And so for here an understanding of consent, when you're still rebuilding your life and trying to figure out the next, healthier phase, is extremely difficult. While the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have helped millions of people, I learned through my reporting that they can also be easily exploited because of the way the program is built.
>
> — Lauren Chooljian, The 13th Step Podcast

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Who Can Be a 13th Stepper?

Anyone can engage in 13th stepping behavior, regardless of their age, gender, or background. The key factor is the difference in recovery experience and group status, not personal characteristics. Someone who has been sober for 2 years has significantly more recovery experience than someone with 2 months.

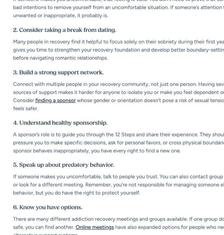
Age, gender, and social status add more layers to these power imbalances. But 13th stepping can happen between people of any background when there's a significant difference in recovery time and group standing. The problems occur when someone takes advantage of newcomers' vulnerability to pursue romantic or sexual relationships with them.

Can Relationships Work in Recovery Communities?

Most experts strongly recommend avoiding romantic relationships during early recovery.[9] The first year of sobriety is a time of major life changes when your emotions are heightened and your entire lifestyle is in flux. Your brain and emotions are still healing, and recovery requires all of your attention and energy.

Even relationships between people with similar recovery time can be problematic. When a romantic relationship in a recovery group ends, it affects the whole community. Fear of running into an ex-partner at meetings can drive someone away from a support system that has become a core piece of their sobriety.

Recovery communities work best when they focus on healing and mutual support, not romantic connections. If you're interested in dating, consider meeting people who lead recovery-friendly lifestyles outside of your recovery circle to protect your safe space for healing.



How to Stay Safe in 12-Step Programs

Your safety and recovery always come first. These strategies can help you protect yourself while still getting the support you need:

1. Trust your instincts.

If someone makes you uncomfortable, that feeling is valid. You don't need to prove that someone has bad intentions to remove yourself from an uncomfortable situation. If someone's attention feels unwanted or inappropriate, it probably is.

2. Consider taking a break from dating.

Many people in recovery find it helpful to focus solely on their sobriety during their first year. This gives you time to strengthen your recovery foundation and develop better boundary-setting skills before navigating romantic relationships.

3. Build a strong support network.

Connect with multiple people in your recovery community, not just one person. Having several sources of support makes it harder for anyone to isolate you or make you feel dependent on them. Consider finding a sponsor whose gender or orientation doesn't pose a risk of sexual tension if that feels safer.

4. Understand healthy sponsorship.

A sponsor's role is to guide you through the 12 Steps and share their experience. They should never pressure you to make specific decisions, ask for personal favors, or cross physical boundaries. If a sponsor behaves inappropriately, you have every right to find a new one.

5. Speak up about predatory behavior.

If someone makes you uncomfortable, talk to people you trust. You can also contact group leadership or look for a different meeting. Remember, you're not responsible for managing someone else's behavior, but you do have the right to protect yourself.

6. Know you have options.

There are many different addiction recovery meetings and groups available. If one group doesn't feel safe, you can find another. Online meetings have also expanded options for people who need alternative support systems.

Start Your Recovery Journey

If you're ready to find addiction treatment for yourself or a loved one, we're here to help. Browse top medical detox centers in the US, inpatient addiction treatment facilities, aftercare options, and more to start on the path to recovery. You can search for rehab by insurance carrier, location, amenities, and more for free. Don't wait. Get help today.

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How to Find an LGBTQ+ Friendly Rehab

By Kayla Gill | Updated February 4, 2026



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As an LGBTQ+ person, it can be hard to find supportive, affirming treatment for addiction. In some cases, it can actually be dangerous to disclose certain aspects of your life to a provider. Other doctors may have good intentions, but lack cultural competency. And if your care team struggles to understand you, recovery can be much harder than it needs to be.

Today, we're in the middle of a cultural shift. Information about LGBTQ+ issues is increasingly accessible. And doctors are starting to understand why that matters. A growing number of rehab centers cater to the unique needs of LGBTQ+ patients.

Finding the Right Rehab for You

Recovery means building a life that works for you. Everyone has unique values, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. In an affirming rehab, your team will guide you through that process without judgment. If you're ready to choose a treatment program, you can ask these questions to see if a particular center is a good fit:

- What experience does your team have treating people of my identity?
- I prefer to be called a name that doesn't match my ID or insurance. Will your staff respect that?
- Does your standard intake form ask for new patients' pronouns?
- Is your program faith-based? If so, how does that inform your approach to treatment?
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- What types of medical care do you offer?
- Does anyone on your team specialize in hormone replacement therapy (HRT)?
- Which support groups can I attend during treatment, if any?
- Do you offer family therapy? If so, can I include my chosen family?

You have the right to get answers to these questions, and any others you might have. And with those answers, you'll be able to assess whether a rehab can support your recovery goals.

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What Is LGBTQ+ Affirming Treatment?

The healing process is different for everyone. And skilled providers will understand that there's more to you than your gender or sexuality. But most LGBTQ+ affirming programs should have certain qualities in common.

Respectful Therapy

The goal of therapy is to become your best self, not to artificially "fix" who you are. Culturally competent therapists honor their patients' identities. Your counselor will help you define your own values, instead of urging you to change them.

1,2 therapy may focus on your personal history and your emotional experience. But feelings don't happen in a vacuum. LGBTQ+ affirming therapists also understand the cultural context that informs your life. Or, if your lifestyle is new to them, they're willing to learn. Their job is to support you in defining yourself, not to debate your identity. And as you become your best self, you can also start building healthier relationships.

Chosen Family Therapy

A family is just a group of people who have things in common. Some families share DNA, or a last name, or an address. But family can also include people with shared history and values, no matter where you first met them.

For many LGBTQ+ people, the idea of "family" is complex and even painful. You might be much closer to your chosen family than your family of origin. No matter how you define the word, your health can have a huge impact on your loved ones. Because of this, family therapy is an important part of addiction recovery.3

LGBTQ+ affirming rehabs offer treatment for both biological and chosen families. Connecting with your loved ones can give you valuable insight into your sense of self.

Body Image

There may be a link between body image issues and drug addiction.4 And body image is an issue for people of any gender or sexuality. However, it might be an even greater concern for LGBTQ+ people.

One study found trans and non-binary people are 2-4 times more likely to have eating disorders.5 According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), this may be due to a few types of social pressure. If you're bullied or targeted because of your identity, you might be more vulnerable. But social pressure within LGBTQ+ communities is also a risk factor.

Fortunately, inpatient treatment isn't just for addiction. You can also go to rehab for a number of mental health issues, including eating disorders. In LGBTQ+ affirming therapy, you'll do more than work through your feelings about your body. You'll also consider the social pressures that contribute to those feelings. The right therapist will be able to help you find balance, without asking you to give up your community.

LGBTQ+ Youth

Historically, it's been difficult to find adequate health care for LGBTQ+ people. At its worst, treatment forced vulnerable teens into living inauthentic lives. Mental health care has come a long way since that time, and there's still a long way to go.

Today, there are many more resources available for LGBTQ+ youth. Providers aim to support this population as they come out and grow into healthy adults. With or without support from their families of origin, LGBTQ+ kids and teens deserve care.

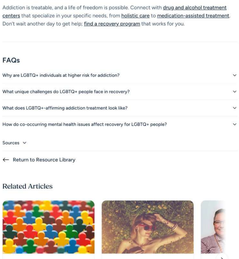
And some rehabs have a special focus on family therapy. For instance, Paradigm Teen & Young Adults Treatment teaches parents and guardians to publicly support their LGBTQ+ teens. This heals much more than interpersonal family dynamics. It also helps young patients connect with community resources. Providers teach them that when a family can accept a teen as they are, "it helps a community to do the same."

If you're a parent or guardian looking to send your teen to rehab, these programs can help. LGBTQ+ people face unique challenges. And it's possible to get your teen the exact type of support they need. This can include anything from a change of scenery to specialized medical care.

Medical Care for Trans People on HRT

Drug use can change the way your body responds to other medications. And when you detox, things will likely change again. This can be a serious concern for trans patients who are on hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Don't let this be a barrier to treatment. You can absolutely start recovery without losing access to these important prescriptions.

At some rehabs, like Canyon Ocean Drive, endocrinologists offer support for transgender patients. These experts ensure your access to gender-affirming care throughout detox and recovery. They'll even help you find a qualified provider for ongoing treatment after rehab.



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Mental Health Stressors in LGBTQ+ Communities

Certain factors put LGBTQ+ people at higher risk for mental health issues. People in this demographic face discrimination, harassment, and a lack of community support. These external stressors make you more vulnerable to mental health issues. And mental health problems can lead to addiction.4

Minority Stress

With or without a diagnosed mental illness, many LGBTQ+ people experience minority stress.5 Minority stress is the state of living under discriminatory conditions. Experts agree that this constant pressure has noticeable negative impacts on your health. Minority stress is common among people who experience oppression, including queer and BIPOC communities.5

Even people without acute trauma can get worn down by these constant challenges. This is partly because minority stress can affect your conception of self. Experts describe "internalized homonegativity," in which LGBTQ+ people lack self-esteem and self-respect. While these are mental health issues, they may have external causes. And while rehab can't take those stressors away, it can help you learn to navigate them.

Trauma and Mental Health Issues

People who do experience severe trauma are likely to develop mental health disorders. For example, LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk for PTSD.6 With that in mind, many rehabs offer trauma-informed care. These programs help you work through difficult memories, and teach you to handle triggers as they come up.

You can even attend rehab to treat addiction and PTSD as co-occurring disorders. In that case, treatment will help you explore the relationship between these conditions.

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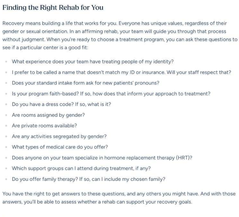
Addiction in the LGBTQ+ Community

LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk for substance use disorders than other demographics.4 One study found that 20–30% of LGBTQ+ people had addictions, compared to about 9% of the total population. And in the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, LGBTQ+ people had a high risk of mental health issues.5

Addiction and mental health issues can amplify each other. Most people need professional help to break out of this cycle. And many LGBTQ+ people lack access to mental health services.5 This may be due to discrimination, or the fear of discrimination due to past trauma. These concerns are valid. And LGBTQ+ affirming rehab centers can address them.



There Is Hope for Recovery

Addiction is treatable, and a life of freedom is possible. Connect with drug and alcohol treatment centers that specialize in your specific needs, from holistic care to medication-assisted treatment. Don't wait another day to get help; find a recovery program that works for you.

FAQs

Why are LGBTQ+ individuals at higher risk for addiction?

What unique challenges do LGBTQ+ people face in recovery?

What does LGBTQ+ affirming addiction treatment look like?

How do co-occurring mental health issues affect recovery for LGBTQ+ people?

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