With relatives who have lived through horrifying social movements and events, some unsavory ideals and behaviors can get carried across generations due to what they went through in their lives. Though there are ways to reflect and grow from these traumas, all wounds take some time to heal. Therapy and other mental health tools help tackle all forms of generational trauma.

words: nicole bires, nat candú & matt gosper, design: isa márquez.

One of the hardest things about unpacking generational trauma can be looking inward and reflecting on it. Though the process is difficult, it’s rewarding.

The emotional scars of past traumas from one generation to the next can be incredibly isolating and debilitating as they manifest in a range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression and addiction, psychology professionals say.

A graduate student majoring in finance at the Miami Herbert Business School comes from a household riddled with alcohol addiction involving her father and grandparents. Her father grew up in a volatile environment, she said.

“When my grandma was drinking, things could get hairy for them,” she said. Although anxiety does impact her daily life, “most of the time I keep myself busy and away from those things.”

Navigating Trauma

Natalie Barillas, a psychologist at UM, said students can gain a better understanding of their trauma, learn coping skills to manage their symptoms and work toward creating healthier patterns of behavior and thought.

“Additionally, therapy can help individuals break the cycles of generational trauma, leading to positive changes in their families and communities,” Barillas said. A graduate student majoring in finance at the Terra Counseling Center in Miami, said a number of therapists are targeted to help those suffering from generational trauma, including ensemble therapy.

This form of therapy allows therapists to work with all members of a family or community, including those who may have been directly impacted by traumas, as well as those who have been indirectly affected, Barillas said.

Claire Gillespie, an experienced health and wellness writer, said generational traumas are treatable through intense holistic intervention techniques and potentially individual-level therapy.

A holistic intervention for generational trauma might involve a combination of therapy, mindfulness practices, physical exercise, nutrition and other alternative therapies. For example, yoga and meditation can help people to manage stress and improve emotional regulation, while group therapy can provide an opportunity for individuals to share their experiences and learn from others who have gone through similar challenges.

“Family therapy can also be an effective coping mechanism for his own anxiety, and she too struggles with anxiety. “I am just anxious about being like him and how would it affect my future plans,” she said. Although anxiety does impact her daily life, “most of the time I keep myself busy and away from those things.”

For many college students, the weight of generational trauma, psychology experts say.

“We must create diverse and inclusive spaces where students can receive healing and care for the unique traumas they have experienced,” Boone said. “By identifying the root causes of these intergenerational patterns, we help young adults break free from the cycles of trauma and chart a healthier and more hopeful path for their futures.”

If you struggle with generational trauma and need help, contact UM’s counseling department by visiting https://counseling.studentaffairs.miami.edu.