



Andreas Krüger

**Powerbook –
First Aid for the Soul**
Trauma Self-Help for Young People

For Nils

*Nothing in the world is
softer and weaker than water,
and yet there is nothing to attack the hard and strong
that can outperform it;
there is nothing that could replace it.
The weak overcomes the strong,
What's soft overcomes what's hard...*

LAOTSE (sixth century BC)
(from the 'Tao Te King', Saying LXXVIII)

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Contents

Introduction

What is this book about?.....	11
Really quite normal.....	12
Obstacles on the journey	13
In search of causes.....	14
My language.....	19
What can I do if I'm not safe?	20

Part I

Important knowledge on emotional injuries – How does a traumatization come about?

Chapter 1

Emotional injuries: a little trauma alphabet	25
<i>Traumatic situation</i> – the ‘no-way-out situation’	27

Chapter 2

<i>The emergency programme in the head</i> – <i>Post-traumatic stress disorder</i>	29
Measuring the temperature and blood pressure of the soul	36
The <i>secondary programme</i>	37
Have a break!.....	42
What happens in the brain after extreme stress?	43
The brain in its ‘normal programme’.....	44
Understanding the <i>emergency programme in the head</i>	52

The purpose of ‘too many’ *stress hormones*:

getting you ready to fight or flee	56
1. The purpose of <i>flashbacks</i> : memories as warning signs	58
2. The purpose of <i>flashbacks</i> : pain – the guardian of the soul.....	59
Overload protection: ‘feeling disconnected’	62
The purpose of overload protection: getting some rest – at whatever cost.....	63
How memory works in the normal programme.....	63
How memory works in the emergency programme	65
You’re normal: what you have experienced – that’s mad!	70
Observing – not judging.....	71
Switching the emergency programme to the normal programme	73
Try to find allies and people to support you!	74
Set yourself realistic targets	75

Part II

Paths to healing and to more contentment and happiness

Chapter 3

So, what is <i>trauma healing</i> ?.....	79
You need to be safe – for your wounds to heal, you need calm	83
What can you do if you’re not safe (yet)?	84
Mind and stamina are important partners in overcoming the emergency programme	84
‘I am many’	85
It’s easier to deal with difficulties in relationships once the emergency programme is switched off	87
If your body is ‘suffering in sympathy’, then a doctor should accompany you on the path to healing.....	88
To begin is always difficult... ..	88
Work can begin. Enough time and energy packed?.....	90
Sources of power in you: important medicine!	90

Chapter 4

First steps to relief: reduce your stress levels!	99
Sleep disorders.....	104
We don't always understand why something helps.....	105
The mind takes control of its own body	107
You have difficulty concentrating, you're easily distracted, you're on edge	107
What's the point of <i>imagination exercises (imagination)s</i> ?.....	110
Intense feelings and lashing out.....	115
<i>Flashbacks</i> , terrible nightmares and <i>dissos</i>	123
The idea of <i>inner younger children</i>	126
<i>The inner stage</i>	135
<i>The safe inner place</i>	138
Working with the <i>inner younger children</i>	139
Helpful guardian	139
Problems on the path to healing.....	140
Looking to the future.....	141
Turning lead into gold	142

Appendix

Key Terms in the Text, with a Short and Concise Explanation.....	143
Exercises, Tasks and Practical Tips.....	151
List of Figures.....	152
Addresses, Web Links and Further Information.....	154

Thanks.....	155
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Space for your own notes.....	156–160
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Sleeve on the inside of the back cover:

- For your power pictures
- Bookmark

Introduction

What is this book about?

Dear Reader,

I'm going to introduce some young people to you in this book who will tell you something about themselves: about injuries to their soul and about healing. I don't use their real names and I present their stories in such a way that the *real* people I know won't recognize themselves. But they all have characteristics which are shared by many young people I know. And so, when they speak, it's almost as if it's all these young people speaking or thinking.

I'm going to begin with Kevin and Jenny, two really nice people. Maybe they're even like you in some ways. And that's what this book is all about. That maybe you'll see *yourself* here and there in the stories I present and then understand better what I'm writing about. Some things work pretty well for Jenny and Kevin, and some things don't work at all. And then neither really know how they should go on.

Really quite normal

A few words about Jenny:

Jenny loves dancing. She loves all kinds of music. The main thing is that she can dance to it. She also likes dancing on her own. Then she can totally lose herself and just feel free. She can immerse herself in another world, in a world she'd like to be most of all, a long way from the whole drudge of everyday life. Jenny likes wearing bright and colourful clothes that people notice. But sometimes, when she feels like it, she wears tatty black clothes. She wants to shock people then. They shouldn't think everything's totally OK just because she's on really good form occasionally.

And there's also another side to Jenny. She's also got a *quiet* side – sometimes she hardly says a word. She's a good listener (but can also chat forever with her friends). She can always suggest something to talk about when her best friend doesn't know anymore. She doesn't know yet what she wants to do with her life, but she already knows exactly what she *doesn't* want to do: 'Get up at six, always the same every day, some crappy *job* with crappy people I can't stand'. She wants to do something with her friends. Something creative or something with people. Or maybe just dance.

... and now to Kevin:

Kevin also likes music. But more the hard stuff. Loud music. Dancing is not really his thing. He likes wandering the town centre with his mates and sometimes they go out into the countryside, too. Always in search of new impressions, new people. He wants to get to know the world. Sometimes he just goes running off. When he's completely out of breath – that's when he feels absolutely free.

Kevin loves riding on the underground for hours, going nowhere in particular. Then he puts the headphones to his MP4-player on and lets

himself be taken over by the music. He listens to *his* music and his friends' music.

Kevin's always there for his mates. He makes fantastic playlists on the computer that his friends can't wait to get their hands on. Because the songs always go together perfectly. He's got a real ear for that.

Kevin thinks a lot about things. He likes doing that. Thinking about God and everything under the sun. He can totally lose himself in his thoughts. The other day he thought just about wealth for an hour. At the end of the day, everyone wants to be rich. But what does that mean – being rich? *A million in your bank account* – is that all? Is he himself rich? Such thoughts come to him often when he's travelling the underground. The thoughts that come out of his head he wants to use in his job one day. This brain should not rust when he's earning money. And, like Jenny, he wants to work with 'good people', people who've got something about them. People who want to get hold of their lives and the world around them, and change something – like he wants to.

Obstacles on the journey

Kevin and Jenny would really like to enjoy life even more. They've got enough life in them. If only there wasn't something really troubling them the whole time. Of course, there are the grown-ups with their rules, regulations and demands. Nobody can be bothered with that. But with Kevin and Jenny there's something different. Something that sits deep inside them – and that's what's troubling them.

Jenny is just a bundle of nerves. She chews on her fingernails the whole time, which looks totally stupid. The others are always asking her why. But she doesn't even know herself. Her legs and feet are always shaking and moving, and not only when she's dancing. She finds it difficult to concentrate at school because she can't get to sleep at night and then has really awful nightmares. She doesn't know whether she's going to make it into the next school year. Sometimes she thinks she's just too stupid. And she knows that if she has to resit the year, she'll lose all her friends.

Kevin's also got his problems. Really, he's a nice, friendly person – he even protects others who are weaker than him. But sometimes he just goes berserk and lashes out. Then he loses control of himself – over some little thing that doesn't go to plan. And every now and again things get broken. Like when he threw his MP4-player against the wall because of something stupid. Then he had no music in his ears for two months. That was a pain in the arse, until his friend gave him his old MP4-player. And he's also got problems at school: Kevin is easily distracted. He's often frustrated. He's not stupid, but he just can't cope with the stuff that's taught in lessons. Sometimes he's really *in a world of his own*, and can't remember afterwards what's just been said. That really frightens him. And also the nightmares that he has from time to time frighten him. He's embarrassed about them. It's hardly cool and hardly normal to have nightmares, is it?

In search of causes

Kevin and Jenny both suffered a lot early on in life. (Maybe it's the same for you...). I don't want to talk about that here. Their souls suffered – *took a real hammering*, so to say. That's important for me to mention here. And that does not happen without traces being left behind. Their souls were injured. And my experience tells me that the problems that Jenny and Kevin are having now are to do with emotional injury. Most people with such problems are ashamed or think they're maybe *not quite right in the head*. That's why they prefer keeping the stuff to themselves. And most grown-ups have little idea where problems such as Jenny's and Kevin's come from. *Better to keep these things to yourself* – that's what both Jenny and Kevin always thought, until they eventually understood everything better. It takes a while to understand that everything is linked. The bad stuff in the past and their problems today. You don't believe me? Then see what you think after you have read the next few pages.

This book is concerned with emotional injuries and emotional healing, with what we call 'trauma healing'. When someone has caused you great harm. Physically. Emotionally. Then maybe your ability to trust other people, to allow yourself to love deeply, to be happy – maybe all this has been lost or damaged. Or when fate suddenly takes from you people you loved. Or when invisible wounds burden your life and make it difficult for you to be happy. Or a serious physical illness casts its shadow over your soul. Then maybe there is a corner of your soul where there are only dark clouds. Maybe you know such problems as Jenny and Kevin have from your own experience.

The first part of this book is about helping you to understand yourself better. To get out of the loneliness that has maybe nested inside you since those terribly stressful events in the past. Maybe you've got a complicated *inner life* that nobody can imagine, unless they were there as well. I promise you greater certainty about what's going on inside you, and that you will understand yourself better.

Just as I get the flu if I stand out in the cold and the rain for two hours in a t-shirt and a pair of shorts with no shoes on, so appear *symptoms* in the mind after extreme stress. Signs of illness such as a cough and runny nose with the flu on the one hand; and signs of emotional trauma on the other. These you can learn to recognize.

Maybe you're like Jenny – often nervous, can't sleep, find it difficult to concentrate. Or maybe you're like Kevin – go berserk and lash out for no real reason. And maybe memories or feelings from the past simply roll over you like a gigantic wave.

Maybe you haven't thought yet that everything could be connected with your awful experiences in the past – that this is how your soul shows its wounds. Maybe you're ashamed of some of the things happening inside you. Perhaps you blame yourself for some of the things that happened.

I can quite safely guarantee one thing, though: despite your difficulties, you are 'normal'. What happened to you – *that* will have been 'mad' and not normal at all...

The second part of this book is concerned with solutions. These I discovered through my time with young people whose souls were threatening to fall apart. There was always the longing for healing. And such a longing has existed for as long as people have inhabited the planet. Away with this unbearable emotional pain! The longing for peace and calm, for more happiness, for the capacity to trust others, for good company. This longing is always there because the soul, or the mind, is perhaps our most fragile – and most valuable – possession. But the wounds can strip us of our happiness and the love we have for ourselves and for other people. Because the pain we feel can hold us firmly in its grip.

But how should this *healing of the soul* work? Provide some relief at least? How can a book help? When the soul overflows and there's no hope in sight after such a long struggle with yourself and your *inner demons*? How should a book make the images, the old *films in the head*, the oppressive feelings from the past, disappear? *Recipes* telling you how to take control of your life – you've maybe been given plenty of them already. 'Not another one, please, and definitely not a whole book of them!', you might want to say.

My approach is different. I want to accompany you, be something of an 'expert' in serious emotional injuries in our shared journey through this book.

The signs of trauma are well researched and easy to recognize if you've dealt with this subject a little. I think that it is precisely with serious emotional injuries that we can see that the mind functions like a separate body part – like the heart, for example.

Research has shown that extreme emotional stress can leave behind *real* injuries to the brain, which can be made visible by special photographic techniques. Research carried out in the last few years has meant that we can now understand emotional injuries, or *psychological traumatization*, from processes in the brain. That's important because it shows that people with their signs of injury are not imagining things; rather, the inner suffering is visible, can be *proven* to exist. That has led to a recognition of people with their suffering. I wish for even more,

though. And I want you yourself to be able to give more *recognition* and *acceptance* to your own (perhaps subconscious) efforts at healing. That in itself would be a very important step towards healing.

As you'll know, even if every person is different, there are signs of emotional injury that are the same or very similar for everyone – just as an arm always breaks in a certain way after a heavy fall. I want you to realize: 'Hey, that's where it comes from. So I'm quite *normal*. What I have experienced – *that* is mad'.

There are certain *techniques of self-control* which could help you to cope better with these disturbing *signs of disorder*, or to switch them off altogether. Your mind is the greatest help here.

I'm going to give you some *self-help* tips. My idea is that, through this book, I can also reach young people who don't come to me in my practice with my work as a doctor. I'm convinced that, with the Powerbook, you will suddenly understand a lot in you and a lot around you much better. A few 'Eureka!' moments await you ;-).

And that's how to get further with yourself. Your mind and knowledge about things are important medicines in dealing with emotional injury. The image of a doctor's case full of good medicine for the soul is appropriate here.

For many, the horror is that, even long after the events, you're still not yet over it in your head. Body and soul remember all too often the bad thing. You have to counter that with *a lot of good* so that you can feel more alive again. To discover or develop these sources, you need attention and mindfulness, which you give yourself. You're sure to have already done a lot to lessen your emotional pain. So that you can cope better with the stress, the stress which your injuries have caused. You could perhaps look there more intensively. Take more from it. Every person has this part within them. Some people talk of *inner healers*, and others of *powers of self-healing*.¹ Call it what you want. It's

¹ People also talk of *resilience* – that's what makes people psychically resistant and contributes to self-healing.

definitely within you, too. Life. Life energy. Your life. Here and now. And your future. I want to encourage you to get hold of it in a targeted way. It'll be worth it. Promise!

Have I made you interested in this book? Have I addressed something in you? Would make me very happy if that's the case. But what would make me even happier would be if you got started now, took something for yourself, and that you feel a little better afterwards. Despite having to learn like at school ;-).

How have I structured my book? It's divided roughly into two parts.

Part I: Important knowledge on emotional injuries – How does a traumatization come about?

Here I deal with recognizing and understanding signs of injury. We know loads about the brain. How it functions, both with and without signs of injury. Brain researchers have written piles and piles of books and articles. Even in summary form, it's still loads. I'll tell you now: that's a lot to get through! But I have to ask you to do it. I've already left out a lot of knowledge that doesn't necessarily have to be in the book. So, even if the stuff looks a bit dry, try to get through it. You'll see later on that everything fits together. I also can't bear it when people go prattling on. But here I haven't written anything that I didn't need to. Everything that's here is what you need. It's like with music. If you want to learn to play an instrument, you first have to practise long and hard. Once you can read the notes and play, you discover for yourself the great music that is in the notes. So, take a break every now and again, put the book to one side for a day. But then carry on! It's worth it. Hopefully the *insight* will come afterwards and, with it, clarity and more calm in your life. I've used a lot of pictures to make our *journey into the brain* a little easier. I've tried really hard so that the difficult stuff comes over easily and sticks!

Part II: Paths to healing and to more contentment and happiness

Here you'll learn something about ways to take care of an injured soul so that its wounds heal. That's more fun and is not as difficult and dry as the first part. You'll be invited to look for the things that already make things easier for you and that you yourself can influence, without help from other people. It is especially this part of the book that people with severe emotional injuries have influenced through their *ground-work*, through the way they have dealt with their injuries. They've tried a lot to help them live with the painful, or simply irritating, circumstances of their lives, which have come about as a result of their injuries. Lots of ideas in this book came through their experiences of trying out different things. I'm going to show you some exercises that you can try out for yourself.

My language

Not all of my patients can already read or are as close to the age of adulthood as you. That's why I've tried to find words for the scientific stuff that even the smallest child can understand – without losing anything important, I hope. That could make things easier for you, too. I've learned that young people and adults also understand this language, and that a simple language has its advantages. I also understood things better when I used a simple language to explain the connections to myself.

Please note: Key terms are explained in the appendix

I have *italicized* important technical terms. You can find explanations of these terms in the appendix at the back of the book if you forget something and want to look it up again quickly. You can also browse the appendix to remind yourself about one or two things, or to deepen your understanding of them.

What can I do if I'm not safe?

If you are not totally safe in your life here and now, then you need help straight away so that the horrors stop and you can finally find safety. 'Safety' does not only mean that your life is not in danger. The soul is a sensitive organ and needs to be in a safe place for healing. If you are still being seriously injured by people – with words or, for example, with violence against your body and soul – then you should get help from outside.

Is there someone in your immediate surroundings who is in a position of power to give you protection? Someone you can trust? Can that person provide you with long-term safety? If you are in danger, is there a youth welfare office near you or the police? One problem here is that the people who work at the youth welfare office and the police *must*, at least according to German law, begin criminal proceedings. That means that you can't just go there if something bad has been done to you, tell them everything, and then just expect them to give you 'a bit of advice'. So, what you should say at the beginning is this: 'I've got a friend who's told me that this and that happened to her. Can you tell me what I or you can do for her so that she can be safe?' If you ask on behalf of a third person, then the people there are allowed simply to 'advise'. And you can then think about whether, and when, you perhaps want to tell them more. That it's really about you. Or they will maybe recommend a place near you

which can give you advice without having to begin criminal proceedings immediately.²

So can this book be of any help at all if you're still in danger? Yes, it can. If you are not safe, then especially the knowledge in Part I can help you to understand yourself better. And, if you read Part II, you'll maybe realize that it could be worth trying everything to get finally the peace and calm you need for healing.

² In the appendix at the back of the book, you will find a telephone number (just for Germany) which you can ring if you are in danger.

Part I

Important knowledge on emotional injuries –
How does a traumatization come about?

Chapter 1

Emotional injuries: a little trauma alphabet

So now it's time to pull your sleeves up, take a deep breath, and go! We should start by explaining what we're talking about when we talk about a 'soul' that is injured. What is a 'soul' exactly? That's not easy to say. We can also talk about the 'psyche' or mind. A lot of it is in what we call the brain. That's the 'computer in the head' which 'controls' the organism. To be more precise, we talk about nerve cells and nerve fibres, and certain areas of the brain which perform certain tasks (seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, thinking, controlling the organism, etc.) to make life possible. If an accident victim is 'brain dead', then everything might still function in their body. The only thing that the body lacks is the consciousness it needs to live. Body as machine made of flesh and blood. But the soul is for some people more than the sum of all its operations of perception, feeling and thinking. Some religions think that the soul 'wanders' from body to body, from human life to human life, from epoch to epoch, much as Buddhists. Christians, Muslims and Jews believe, for example, that, after the body has died, the soul continues to exist 'in heaven', close to God or Allah. People who have experienced situations of extreme danger report that they 'saw' the terrible situation from a distance, and that the soul had been outside their body. The seventh sense leads people to have sudden 'intuitions' about what is happening in a different part of the world. Some people say. Researchers are working on it. And they haven't yet found out much how that should work. Physicists are trying to help them in their work. They are investigating the smallest particles, buzzing through the universe

influencing each other and transmitting information. Well. The soul really is such a thing. A sensitive organ, in any case. This is how I try to explain it to small children:

'When you're angry, annoyed, sad or very happy, or love someone very much, then maybe that is the soul speaking. Imagine you are by the sea and you take a mussel home with you. You press the mussel into the wet sand of your sandpit, without your friend noticing. Then you shout to her: "Look in the sand!" And your friend will probably say: "A mussel!" "Not true", you reply, "it's just the impression of the mussel, and the real mussel is here in my pocket". That's how it is with the soul, too. We can usually only imagine it where it is showing itself at that moment'.

Maybe you can make something of this example, too. Everyone talks about the soul, everyone imagines what it might be, but nobody really knows exactly what it is. But parts of the soul, of the *psychological apparatus*, can be seriously injured. And they are parts which are linked closely to the body. They are parts of the 'computer in the head'. It is with these parts of the mind that this book is mainly concerned.

And now we should explain which emotional injuries we want to talk about here. We're not talking here about what to do if your little sister says naughty words to you or says something that embarrasses you. We're talking about serious emotional injuries, which are also called *psychological traumatization*. We're talking about events which would lead practically every person of this age to experience overwhelming feelings of fear, shame or desperation. We call such a situation a *traumatic situation*. To give you an idea of the conditions which scientists would call a *traumatic situation*, here is an example from the animal world (-;):

Imagine a rabbit hopping through the woods whistling a tune. It comes to a meadow. It's learned that the meadow is the territory of the cat. And that cats eat rabbits. But it's forgotten this for the moment. It reaches the middle of the meadow. Cat sees rabbit. Jumps on rabbit. Rabbit can just about escape into a corner between two large stones. The cat can't get to the rabbit, but the cat's claws flash again and again

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before the rabbit's eyes, backwards and forwards. The rabbit is trapped. It can't flee and it can't fight back. Such a situation is what we mean by a *traumatic situation*. We can also call it a '*no-way-out situation*'.

People can also be in this situation if they have to watch others suffering. We have the ability to empathize with others, which means that in such a situation the person who has to witness something terrible suffers as much as, or maybe even more than, the person directly involved – and can become traumatized.

Traumatic situation – the 'no-way-out situation'

A little more theory again. Four things have to come together for us to be able to talk about a *traumatic situation* or a '*no-way-out situation*':

1. **Danger to your own life** ('cats eat rabbits') or danger to the life of another person. Can in special cases also be a pet that you love very much which is in danger, or when emotional integrity is threatened (betrayal, abuse of feelings or of confidence in adults, sexual violence).
2. You **cannot flee** ('path is blocked, cul-de-sac').
3. You can't **fight back** ('cat is stronger than rabbit').
4. There is a totally overpowering helplessness, which is accompanied by ***traumatic powerlessness ('No-way-out!')***

When a catastrophe, a *traumatic situation*, suddenly breaks over a person, then what we call *traumatic stress* emerges. The limit has been exceeded. The *psychological apparatus* can no longer cope with the stress. The biological processes in the 'organ of the soul' stop. Various changes in the brain are now visible as signs of disorder – and are also 'measurable' under laboratory conditions. The stress burns itself into the brain.

It's this stress which can set off a psychological disorder called a ***post-traumatic stress disorder*** (post = after) – the first signs of emotional wounding. I call this disorder the ***emergency programme in the head***. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Have you ever felt like the rabbit in my example? Or can someone tell you that you might (as a little child) have been in a *traumatic situation* that you can't remember anymore? Research has shown that violence against the mother while still pregnant or a particularly difficult birth can cause damage to the soul of the unborn child. Then it's very likely that the *emergency programme in the head* was 'switched' on. Maybe you can't remember anymore. Members of your family tell you that something terrible happened to you or that you witnessed something terrible. Traumatic stress sometimes affects the capacity to remember. I'll be explaining that again later, too.

In the next chapter, I want to describe to you what it means to live with the emergency programme, with a *post-traumatic stress disorder*.

Chapter 2

The emergency programme in the head – Post-traumatic stress disorder

With illnesses of the body, we can group together certain signs of illness. With a heart attack, for example, there is pain in the upper chest area and the left arm as well as changes to the blood.

A person suffering from a *post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*, an *emergency programme in the head*, develops typical signs of illness, called *symptoms*, which can also be grouped together:

1. Symptoms which can be called signs of overstimulation scientists call *hyperarousal* (a physical arousal of the entire body).
2. Symptoms known as *flashbacks*, which are overwhelming memories.
3. Symptoms called *avoidance behaviour*; and conditions in which the person has a *feeling of disconnectedness*.³ I simply call this a '*disso*'.

Now I want to list the individual signs of disorder that belong to each of the three groups. These can be joined by additional *symptoms*, which I have grouped together as number '4' on the list. These are not classed as a PTSD by big fat medicine books, but they do often accompany a PTSD and can be very disturbing. You can see whether you recognize any of these 'signs of disorder' in yourself and maybe put a cross next to them. You can then see if you are suffering from a PTSD. All disorder

³ These conditions are also called dissociative symptoms.

ders which appear after a 'no-way-out situation' can be called *traumatic stress disorders*. If the first signs of wounding to the soul cannot be healed immediately, and the traumatized person cannot find safety and care quickly, then the *symptoms* of PTSD can change. Maybe you've noticed that you had some of the symptoms in the past that you don't have today, or that you have symptoms today that you didn't use to have. If that's the case, then use two different colours: one for the earlier *symptoms*, and one for the *symptoms* today. Often *the 'dissos'*, for example, increase. That is so because the whole person tries to adapt to the changes caused by the *emergency programme in the head*. And that is how *symptoms* change over time.

Please note (!):

It's very important to say one thing at this point in the book: there are different ways that you might have come to this book. My suggestion is that you note down your own 'symptoms' and compare them with the list on the next few pages. These pages may have a few uncertain parts for you, as an individual. It's possible, for example, that you yourself will find things here that are not described correctly and that you will come to the wrong conclusions concerning possible symptoms in your case. And then to a false 'diagnosis'. Of course such a list cannot replace getting advice from an expert who will look with you at your life situation as a whole. If you already have such help, then this book can certainly still be a good supplement. But, if you don't have access to support or you don't want such support, then this book offers you a good chance to see things more clearly. Maybe your 'diagnoses' also hit the mark and would be confirmed by an expert.

I also want to reach young people who are far away from a 'doctor for the soul', or who are not ready to open up, or who simply don't want to. Like with the man wandering through the desert. He has to rely on the medicines in his rucksack if something happens. He's been bitten by a spider. He's not sure whether the symptoms that he has point to a poisonous spider, and he only saw the spider fleetingly. If he doesn't do anything and the spider was poisonous, he will die without the antidote. What would you advise him to do? So, take this book and read on.