Can one person make a difference?

Many trauma survivors find that working for social change aids their own healing process. People may call their efforts working for change, service to others or carrying the message. Whichever words people choose, the key idea is that people often help themselves by helping others. What can you do to make a difference? Here are 10 ideas to get you started:

1. **Take care of yourself.** Working on your own issues is the first step toward working for change. As the saying goes, we must heal ourselves before we can heal the world.

2. **Break the silence.** Going to a support group and sharing your story can be a radical act! Our society encourages people to stay quiet about certain issues. When you say “I’ve been abused” or “I’m in recovery from addiction,” others find it easier to break their silence.

3. **Contribute to your support group.** Help set up tables, chairs and literature before the meeting. Help clean up afterward. Help a new person feel welcome.

4. **Get involved in your community.** Join an organization that works for change. Donate canned goods to a food pantry. Volunteer to tutor a child at your school.

5. **Be assertive in your conversations.** Refuse to laugh at sexist or racist jokes. Respectfully express your opinions about issues you care about.

6. **Contact people who make decisions.** Complain to TV stations about violent programs. Call radio stations that play music glorifying drug use. Write to advertisers who promote stereotypes or sponsor objectionable programs.

7. **Exercise your right to vote.** Also write or call elected officials to tell them where you stand on issues that affect you.

8. **Talk to your children.** Discuss the violence they see in TV shows, movies and video games. Help them understand what happens when people do these things in real life. Educate them about alcohol and drug abuse, dating violence and other dangers.

9. **Be a role model.** Host a potluck or social gathering where no alcohol is served. Refuse to buy violent toys or video games for your children. And don’t hit your kids. Slapping or spanking shows them it’s okay to solve problems by hitting others.

10. **Resolve not to “look the other way.”** Call police if you suspect someone is being abused. Report criminal activities that you observe in your neighborhood.

**A final note:** Start small. Begin by seeking help for yourself. Go to a support group. Share your story. Talk to your children. The longest journey begins with the first step.