Dear Trauma Therapist

There are some things you may already know and maybe some things you will need to learn, and at the end of the day I am coming to you for guidance, support, boundaries and healing...but do you really know what you are getting in to?

You will understand at a very basic level that as a child I had no voice, no power and no control. But do you really 'get it' what that means to me today? Can you really understand why I am the way that I am? Probably not, but since I am coming to you for help this is something we will work through together. But maybe it would help if I gave you a little more of a foundation on voices, power and control.

I am still a child somewhere inside, still yearning for attachment yet hating the process. I grew up promising that I wouldn’t allow anyone to love me, or even like me...not even for a second. As we get into this are you willing to fight me for control? Are you able to hold me emotionally again and again even when I act like I don’t need or want you around? Sometimes, you will feel as powerless as I have felt...and I will continue to battle you. I will agree that it never made sense and especially now doesn’t make sense for me to be like all those other people that have harmed me by continuing to harm myself, but I will do it...and it will make you sad, mad or seemingly powerless.

I will harm myself for many reasons; because it makes me numb out to the pain, because I need to feel strong when I am most afraid and sad, because I know you will respond to me like I wasn’t responded to as a child, I will do it because I believe I deserve it and because sometimes it just works better. This is NOT a reflection of you or your ability to help me. This does not mean you need to react hastily just to make it stop. I need boundaries and empathy and a direct conversation about my behaviors. You see, as a kid I had strong feelings about the things happening to me and I hid them. Now they are here, for you to see and back then I needed someone to recognize these feelings and react as if it mattered hugely, please act as if this matters hugely...but not in an angry way.

You will find that I react to you in strong and strange ways about the simplest changes. Moving an appointment time, a new furniture arrangement, a new trinket on your desk and “Oh my gosh, is that a ring on your finger?” As a kid, things were happening all around me and no one thought I was paying attention. But I was. I learned to be hypervigilant of every object and person around me and determined that change was usually complicated and sometimes deceitful. Every thing that you do matters immensely to me, especially in the beginning. (and especially when I try to convince you that it doesn’t matter and that I am ok) And if we work together for a long time, the changes I experience within me can cause this same reaction. This will probably annoy and frustrate you because you will probably think there are more important things to discuss instead of why I am so bothered by that new item on your desk, sometimes this is an avoidance strategy and sometimes it really does mean something to me, I just can’t figure out what it is yet. Consistency and change can be catastrophic in my little world and the outcome used to mean something huge or scary was taking place. Take a little break and remember that I will need external validation for quite some time. If you have endurance and patience, I’ll get it eventually.

Remember that you know yourself pretty well and assume by your caseload that you must be a trustworthy person. I have nothing to go on but your actions within the therapy room and for a long time that is not very much to go on. I won’t know your friends and your family or even what
your other patients think of you. Awards on a wall mean nothing, especially when at home my family always looked normal. I can’t know you outside of these walls, so trust can take a bit longer. I was used to friendly fronts and fake smiles and I trusted a few times that those people would be different. My trust was broken. Sometimes I would know someone for a long time, and then randomly it felt, things changed. It probably won't seem very fair because you work so hard to make me feel safe and you wish that I could just let go of my walls for a second to see that it can be different. This is where you'll need to take deep breaths and remember that it really isn't you that I am fighting. I am fighting the system of beliefs I have constructed from my past and the meaning I have given trust and relationships. I probably like you, but it’s risky and this will take time. Even when you think it's done, one little ripple in the trust pond can send me back in to ‘alarm mode’ and I will try to protect myself from something that really doesn’t exist anymore...and yes, you'll need to keep trying.

You'll need to remember that the thoughts and feelings I have about trust and relationships run as deep as you know the sky to be blue. They are ALL I know and trying something just once, at one time, could risk my life as I knew it. This is obviously not true today, but did you really just expect me to take your word? Sometimes you may think that I am not really going to therapy to get better because I don't seem like I am trying very hard to change. I'll ask you to ask yourself why I would even walk through the door again. Some sessions it may be a huge deal for me to sit in a room alone with you, just being there is admitting to myself that I am not in control of things or that something in my past actually happened. You know what? That is HUGE for me. There is hope though. While I may be very temperamental and somewhat of an emotional land mine, if you stick to being dependably real with me...I will learn to trust you. I will learn to process and accept mistakes by you, by us and by myself. I will learn to use our relationship as a foundation for healthy connection, I won’t need you as much as I need you right at this very moment, I will learn to make better choices and I will become a more independent person. One day things will begin to settle into place and I will gain confidence in each progressive step I make, and more importantly I will be able to learn from my mistakes and not feel regret or shame over them. I will not appear so small, afraid and insecure. After the rage, manipulation, tears and fighting I will be the person that I was meant to be and you’ll be a part of that process. Trauma therapy isn’t often like traditional therapies and there is a lot of pain, heartache, frustration, etc. Oh, and it’s a whole lot of patience and waiting. I am coming to you for help, to be different than all those people in my past and I probably won't even know why I showed up in the first place. I will appreciate your honesty, your empathy and compassion and even more than those, your boundaries. Hang in there.

Sincerely,
A Trauma Patient