



Newsletter

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Trauma Symptoms – You not going crazy!

If you've gone through a traumatic experience, you may be struggling with upsetting emotions, frightening memories, or a sense of constant danger. Or you may feel numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people.

When bad things happen, it can take a while to get over the pain and feel safe again. But with the right treatment, self-help strategies, and support, you can speed your recovery. Whether the traumatic event happened years ago or yesterday, you can heal and move on.



Potentially traumatic events are powerful and upsetting incidents that intrude into daily life. They are usually defined as experiences which are life threatening, or where there is a significant threat to one's physical or psychological wellbeing.

The same event may have little impact on one person but cause severe distress in another individual. The impact that an event has may be related to the person's mental and physical health, level of available support at the time of the event, and past experience and coping skills.

What is emotional and psychological trauma?

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world.

Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but **any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm.** It's not the objective facts that determine whether an event is traumatic, but your *subjective emotional experience* of the event. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized.

An event will most likely lead to emotional or psychological trauma if:

- It happened unexpectedly.
- You were unprepared for it.
- You felt powerless to prevent it.
- It happened repeatedly.
- Someone was intentionally cruel.
- It happened in childhood.

Emotional and psychological trauma can be caused by single-blow, one-time events, such as a horrible accident, a natural disaster, or a violent attack. Trauma can also stem from ongoing, relentless stress, such as living in a crime-ridden neighborhood or struggling with cancer.

Trauma is not only violence such as high-jacking, home invasion, a physical attack or terrorism but many overlooked causes of emotional and psychological trauma could include:



- Falls or sports injuries
- Surgery (especially in the first 3 years of life)
- The sudden death of someone close
- A car accident
- The breakup of a significant relationship
- A humiliating or deeply disappointing experience
- The discovery of a life-threatening illness or disabling condition

Not all potentially traumatic events lead to lasting emotional and psychological damage. Some people rebound quickly from even the most tragic and shocking experiences. Others are devastated by experiences that, on the surface, appear to be less upsetting.

A number of risk factors make people susceptible to emotional and psychological trauma. People are more likely to be traumatized by a stressful experience if they're already under a heavy stress load or have recently suffered a series of losses.

People are also more likely to be traumatized by a new situation if they've been traumatized before – especially if the earlier trauma occurred in childhood.

Childhood trauma increases the risk of future trauma

Experiencing trauma in childhood can have a severe and long-lasting effect. Children who have been traumatized see the world as a frightening and dangerous place. When childhood trauma is not resolved, this fundamental sense of fear and helplessness carries over into adulthood, setting the stage for further trauma.

Childhood trauma results from anything that disrupts a child's sense of safety and security, including:

- An unstable or unsafe environment
- Separation from a parent
- Serious illness
- Intrusive medical procedures
- Sexual, physical, or verbal abuse
- Domestic violence
- Neglect
- Bullying



Symptoms of emotional and psychological trauma

Following a traumatic event, or repeated trauma, people react in different ways, experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to think, feel, or respond to trauma, so don’t judge your own reactions or those of other people. **Your responses are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events.**

Emotional and psychological symptoms of trauma:

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb

Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

These symptoms and feelings typically last from a few days to a few months, gradually fading as you process the trauma. But even when you’re feeling better, you may be troubled from time to time by painful memories or emotions—especially in response to triggers such as an anniversary of the event or an image, sound, or situation that reminds you of the traumatic experience.

Grieving is normal following trauma

Whether or not a traumatic event involves death, survivors must cope with the loss, at least temporarily, of their sense of safety and security. The natural reaction to this loss is grief. Like people who have lost a loved one, trauma survivors go through a grieving process. This process, while inherently painful, is easier if you turn to others for support, take care of yourself, and talk about how you feel.

Tips on managing psychological trauma

There are several things you can do to look after yourself and promote recovery from a traumatic event or situation. The following points provide some general advice.

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing experience and give yourself permission to experience some reaction to it. Don't be angry with yourself for being upset.
- Remind yourself that you are not abnormal and that you can and are coping.
- Avoid overuse of alcohol or other drugs to cope.
- Avoid making any major decisions or big life changes.
- Do not try to block out thoughts of what has happened. Gradually confronting what has happened will assist in coming to terms with the traumatic experience.
- Don't 'bottle up' your feelings - share your experiences with others when opportunities arise. This may feel uncomfortable at times, but talking to understanding people that you trust is helpful in dealing with trauma.
- Try to maintain a normal routine. Keep busy and structure your day.

- Make sure you do not unnecessarily avoid certain activities or places.
- Allow yourself time to rest if you are feeling tired, and remember that regular exercise is important.
- Let your friends and family know of your needs. Help them to help you by letting them know when you are tired, need time out, or need a chance to talk or just be with someone.
- Make time to practise relaxation. You can use a formal technique such as progressive muscle relaxation, or just make time to absorb yourself in a relaxing activity such as gardening or listening to music. This will help your body and nervous system to settle and readjust.
- If the trauma that you experience stirs up other memories or feelings from a past unrelated stressful occurrence, or even childhood experiences, try not to let the memories all blur together. Keep the memories separate and deal with them separately.
- Express your feelings as they arise. Whether you discuss them with someone else or write them down in a diary, expressing feelings in some way often helps the healing process.

Most people who experience a traumatic event will not require treatment. Most will work through their anxiety with support from close friends and family. However, for some people the response to the trauma can be debilitating and treatment from a trained mental health professional will be needed to help the person to recover.

Treatments for a severe trauma response include trauma-focused psychological interventions. These focus on providing education, stress management techniques, and helping the person to confront feared situations and distressing memories. Medication, particularly some of the new antidepressant drugs, can often be useful alongside trauma-focused psychological approaches.

WHEN SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS
YOU HAVE THREE CHOICES. YOU
CAN EITHER LET IT DEFINE YOU,
LET IT DESTROY YOU, OR YOU
CAN LET IT STRENGTHEN YOU.

factsaboutyou

This newsletter has been issued by:

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Play Therapy * Counselling * Trauma Counselling

Please note that this information must not be used for diagnostic purposes. Please visit a medical professional for a correct diagnosis.