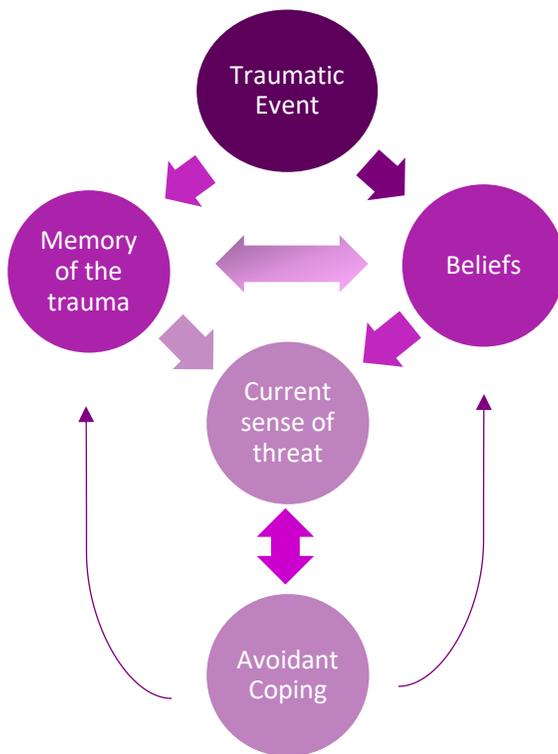


# THE LINK BETWEEN PTSD AND SUBSTANCE USE



## WHAT IS PTSD?

“PTSD is a condition that can develop after you have gone through a life-threatening event. If you have PTSD, you may have trouble keeping yourself from thinking over and over about what happened to you. You may try to avoid people and places that remind you of the trauma. You may feel numb. Lastly, if you have PTSD, you might find that you have trouble relaxing. You may startle easily and you may feel on guard most of the time.”

– National Center for PTSD  
[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

## PTSD AND SUBSTANCE USE

PTSD and substance abuse commonly occur together ranging from 30-59% of cases in women and 11-38% of cases in men. The relationship between PTSD and substance use is complicated, as people use substances for several reasons like to escape or cope with PTSD, to “get through the day,” or because they have little desire to keep their bodies alive and healthy, to name a few. However, substance use can either increase or decrease PTSD symptoms and puts individuals at higher risk for exposure to traumatic events.

- Nejavits (2002)

# HEALING FROM PTSD AND SUBSTANCE USE

## STAGES OF HEALING



### Stage 1: Safety

- Free yourself from substance use
- Build healthy relationships
- Cope with your feelings
- Protect yourself from destructive people and situations
- Do not hurt yourself or others
- Increase your functioning
- Attain stability



### Stage 2: Mourning

- Grieving your past - what trauma and substance use did to you.
- Cry deeply over the loss (e.g., loss of innocence, loss of trust, loss of time)



### Step 3: Reconnection

- Reconnect with the world in joyful ways.

*There are research-backed therapeutic interventions that have been shown to significantly improve symptoms of trauma and substance use. Some examples are Seeking Safety and Cognitive Processing Therapy.*

## SAFELY COPING WITH TRAUMA

Actively engaging in healthy coping strategies allows for survivors to take direct action, which can make us feel less hopeless.

There are several things to consider when beginning to cope with trauma. The first being that the feelings you have related to the traumatic event are normal. The second is understanding that recovery is a process that takes time and active coping. Finally, knowing the difference between safe coping and unsafe coping is necessary.



### Safe Coping

1. Asking for help
2. Taking good care of your body
3. Setting a boundary in a relationship
4. Rethinking the situation

### Unsafe Coping

1. Using Substances
2. Hurting yourself (e.g., cutting or burning)
3. Letting someone harm you
4. Acting Impulsively

<b>FOR UNWANTED DISTRESSING MEMORIES</b>	<b>FOR SUDDEN FEELINGS OF ANXIETY OR PANIC</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind yourself they are just memories and it is normal to have them</li> <li>• Talk about them to someone you trust</li> <li>• Remember, they often lessen with time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind yourself these reactions are not dangerous and you would not feel worried if they were occurring during exercise</li> <li>• Slow down your breathing</li> <li>• These sensations will pass</li> </ul>
<b>FOR FLASHBACKS</b>	<b>FOR NIGHTMARES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep your eyes open</li> <li>• Tell yourself where you are and that you are safe</li> <li>• Get up and move around</li> <li>• Call someone you trust and tell them about it</li> <li>• Remind yourself this is a common response</li> <li>• Tell your counselor or doctor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind yourself it is a reaction to a dream</li> <li>• Get out of bed, orient to here and now</li> <li>• Engage in a calming activity like listening to relaxing music</li> <li>• Tell someone if possible</li> <li>• Talk to your doctor about nightmares, they may prescribe helpful medications.</li> </ul>
<b>FOR DIFFICULTY FALLING OR STAYING ASLEEP</b>	<b>FOR IRRITABILITY, ANGER, AND RAGE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep a regular bedtime schedule</li> <li>• Avoid heavy exercise for a few hours before bed</li> <li>• Only use your bed for sleeping and sex</li> <li>• Avoid alcohol, tobacco, or caffeine</li> <li>• Don't allow yourself to lie in bed thinking or worrying. Get up and do something soothing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a time out</li> <li>• Exercise daily</li> <li>• Remember anger doesn't work; it increases your stress and can cause health problems</li> <li>• Talk to your counselor or doctor</li> <li>• If you blow up at family or friends, talk to them about it; let them know how you feel and how you are coping.</li> </ul>
<b>FOR DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING OR STAYING FOCUSED</b>	<b>FOR TROUBLE FEELING OR EXPRESSING POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow down. Give yourself time.</li> <li>• Write things down/make to-do lists</li> <li>• Break down tasks into small chunks</li> <li>• Plan a realistic number of events or tasks each day.</li> <li>• Consult with your doctor or counselor. Difficulty with focus could be symptom of depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember this is a common reaction to trauma.</li> <li>• Do not feel guilt for something you cannot control.</li> <li>• Engage in activities you enjoy or used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it</li> <li>• Let your loved ones know you care; call them or send a note, small gift, or card.</li> </ul>
<b>GROUNDING</b>	
<p>This is an exercise that tackles various symptoms of trauma. It allows us to take our mind off of a memory, bring ourselves out of a flashback, or reduce anxiety in general. To do this, simply notice some things you see, some things you feel (where your body is in physical space), some things you hear, some smells, and something you taste.</p>	