

# TRAUMA REACTIONS

## UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH TRAUMA

When we are involved in a traumatic event, we develop various stress reactions. Bringing awareness to what is happening when you experience a traumatic event may decrease fear and give you a better handle on things.

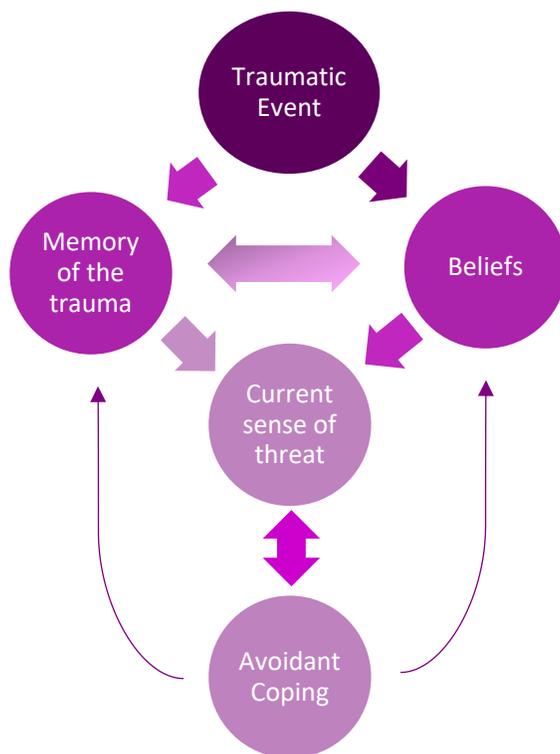
### COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

#### Check what applies to you

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have current distressing memories I don't want                  | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel on guard and constantly alert                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel sudden feelings of anxiety or panic                        | <input type="checkbox"/> I have trouble sleeping                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I experience flashbacks that make it seem I am in a bad situation | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel irritable or have outbursts of anger          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have nightmares   | <input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty concentrating or staying focused   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often find myself avoiding people or places                     | <input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty concentrating or staying focused   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I smoke, drink, or use drugs too often                            | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a difficult time expressing positive emotions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have work or school problems                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> I act impulsively                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not take care of my health                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not trust others                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not feel love or joy   | <input type="checkbox"/> I get into conflicts with people I love              |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> I am withdrawn                                       |

Adopted from: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

### COMMON PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR AFTER TRAUMA



The most common problem that occurs after a trauma event is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

#### 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)

#### OTHER COMMON PROBLEMS OCCUR AFTER TRAUMA

- Depression
- Self-blame
- Suicidal thoughts
- Anger/aggressive behavior
- Guilt and Shame
- Alcohol and Drug abuse

*There are researched-backed therapeutic interventions that have been shown to significantly improve the symptoms of trauma. Some examples are Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure, and Seeking Safety.*

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO COPE WITH TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

Actively engaging in healthy coping strategies allows for survivors to take direct action, which makes them feel less hopeless. There are several things to consider when beginning to cope with trauma.

### 1. RECOGNIZING THE FEELINGS AND REACTIONS YOU HAVE TO TRAUMA ARE *NORMAL*.

Experiencing a traumatic event and having a stress reaction does not make you “weak” or “crazy.” Actively acknowledging the trauma and taking direct action to improve things in your life increases your resiliency.

### 2. KNOWING RECOVERY IS A PROCESS

It is possible to heal from trauma. However, the recovery is a process where active coping becomes a habit and not something done in the midst of a crisis. You may continue to have ongoing responses to trauma as you engage in recovery. This is normal. Recovery takes time happening little by little and healing does not mean forgetting traumatic events or not experiencing pain when you think about them. Rather, healing means fewer and fewer symptoms that bother you less, and confidence you can better manage your memories symptoms and feelings.

### 3. SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

<p><b>FOR UNWANTED DISTRESSING MEMORIES</b></p> <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>	<p><b>FOR SUDDEN FEELINGS OF ANXIETY OR PANIC</b></p> <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>
<p><b>FOR FLASHBACKS</b></p> <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>	<p><b>FOR NIGHTMARES</b></p> <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>
<p><b>FOR DIFFICULTY FALLING OR STAYING ASLEEP</b></p> <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>	<p><b>FOR IRRITABILITY, ANGER, AND RAGE</b></p> <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>
<p><b>FOR DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING OR STAYING FOCUSED</b></p> <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>	<p><b>FOR TROUBLE FEELING OR EXPRESSING POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b></p> <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>
<p><b>GROUNDING</b></p>	
<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>	