

3 Ways Unresolved Trauma Is Hurting Your Relationships

1. Emotional Escalation

We're all guilty of being short-tempered every now and then or snapping at our partner. Maybe we had a bad night sleeping or a long day at work. We're human. And it happens. However, emotional escalation takes on a life of its own when it's based on unresolved trauma.

For example, you may be unusually tense or agitated all, or most, of the time where your typical go-to reactions are to either lash out or shut down. Obviously, neither of these are a healthy way to react.

However, when unresolved trauma is along for the ride, better judgement is shown the door.

Stress pushes our nervous system past its ability to regulate. We may wind up staying stuck in our sympathetic nervous system—on fight, flight or freeze.

Symptoms of being “stuck” in your sympathetic nervous system include: tense muscles, headaches, anger, overthinking and hyperactivity—all of which keep you stuck in ready-to-react mode and unable to relax.

2. Compulsive/Addictive Behavior.

At the root of all compulsive or addictive behavior is trauma. Unresolved and unprocessed pain can feel so overwhelming for a person, that *any* behavior can be turned to, in order to emotionally numb.

Here is where self-sabotage often takes a front seat which can include: sexual addictions, infidelity, an inability to be alone, drug/alcohol addictions, gaming addictions, or even workaholism. When addictive behavior is keeping a person chained to the cycle of trauma, it's based on several things which include neurotransmitters and hormones such as dopamine, norepinephrine, oxytocin and cortisol, as well as the emotional rush (or numbing) from the addictive behavior. Dopamine, norepinephrine and oxytocin feel good—they mimic those warm-fuzzy feelings and reward center in our brain. For an adult who didn't receive love, attention or affection as a kid, this feel-good cocktail of neurotransmitters and hormones becomes addicting in itself.

For example, if depression or anxiety spike, so may a pornography addiction or gaming addiction as a way of fleeing the pain or drama and to emotionally numb. Each time those neurotransmitters or hormones are triggered, so is the addictive rush.

3. Emotional Disconnection

This is often referred to as “neck, up”—all analytical, with little to no emotion. This type of trauma response is often longstanding where a kid may have been shamed or went unheard, so as an adult they’re silencing themselves and shutting down, while emotionally disconnecting from their partner.

Emotional disconnection is the flipside of emotional escalation. Whereas escalation is based on hyper-reactivity, disconnection is based on hypo-reactivity.

If one partner isn’t emotionally present, communication ceases. This situation is often synonymous with Avoidant attachment, where things need to remain superficial and fun, or unresolved trauma can be triggered.

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