



Amaranth Foundation

What is Trauma?

The word 'trauma' is derived from the Greek term for 'wound'. Very frightening or distressing events may result in a psychological wound or injury - a difficulty in coping or functioning normally following a particular event or experience.

Traumatic stress develops when a person makes sense of a traumatic event in a way that leads to a sense of serious current threat. The person feels, thinks and acts as though the world is a more dangerous place than they realised it was before the traumatic event. The person is more likely to see potential danger and threat than they were before the traumatic event—the threat is not just in the past but in the present and future as well. (*Phoenix Australia: Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health 2011*)

What is a potentially traumatic event?

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 well-being. Everyone's reaction is different, 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. Situations and events that can lead a person to experience psychological trauma include:

- Acts of violence such as an armed robbery, war or terrorism
- Natural disasters such as bushfire, earthquake or floods
- Interpersonal violence such as rape, child abuse, or suicide of a family member or friend

- Involvement in a serious motor vehicle or workplace accident.

Other less severe but still stressful situations can also trigger traumatic reactions in some people.

(https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/trauma/)

TRAUMATIC EVENTS ARE OVERWHELMING.

When something traumatic happens, it is often overwhelming, and it can be hard to come to terms with what has happened. The experience is likely to be very different from anything you have gone through before. It can mean you question things that you have always thought were true. For example, you might no longer believe that the world is a safe place, that people are generally good, or that you are in control of what happens to you. When people talk about their world being turned upside down after a traumatic event, it might mean these big picture beliefs have been shattered.

It's important to realise that trauma is very different to other stressful events, like a relationship breakdown or the death of a loved one through natural causes. These events can affect a person's mental health, but they are not the same as the traumatic events described above. Recognising this difference is important, because the recommended treatments to help people recover from trauma are different to those generally used for mental health problems caused by stressful life events.

(<http://phoenixaustralia.org/recovery/what-are-traumatic-events/>)

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Emotional & 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....**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.
- the breakup of a significant relationship

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.

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/emotional-and-psychological-trauma.htm>

Commonly over looked causes of emotional or psychological trauma 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

What are the symptoms of psychological trauma?

Many people have strong emotional or physical reactions following experience of a traumatic event. For most, these reactions subside over a few days or weeks. For some, the symptoms may last longer and be more severe. This may be due to several factors such as the nature of the traumatic event, the level of

available support, previous and current life stress, personality, and coping resources.

Symptoms of trauma can be described as physical, cognitive (thinking), behavioural (things we do) and emotional. Physical symptoms include:

- Excessive alertness, on the look-out for signs of danger
- Easily startled
- Fatigue/exhaustion
- Disturbed sleep
- General aches and pains

Cognitive symptoms include

- Intrusive thoughts and memories of the event
- Visual images of the event
- Nightmares
- Poor concentration and memory
- Disorientation
- Confusion

Behavioural symptoms include

- Avoidance of places or activities that are reminders of the event
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Loss of interest in normal activities

Emotional symptoms include:

- Fear
- Numbness and detachment
- Depression
- Guilt
- Anger and irritability
- Anxiety and panic

With understanding and support from family, friends and colleagues the stress symptoms usually resolve more rapidly. A minority of people will develop more serious conditions such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, or alcohol and drug problems.

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/emotional-and-psychological-trauma.htm>

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.

www.helpguide.org

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.

https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/trauma/

What did a happy ending even mean in real life, anyway? In stories you simply said, 'They lived happily ever after,' and that was it. But in real life people had to keep on living, day after day, year after year."

Scott Westerfeld, *Afterworlds*

When should I seek help?

You should seek professional assistance if the symptoms resulting from the trauma are too distressing or last for more than a couple of weeks. Warning signs may include:

- Being unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- Feeling numb and empty
- Continuing to experience strong distressing emotions
- Continuing to have physical symptoms of being tense, agitated, and on edge
- Continuing to have disturbed sleep and/ or nightmares
- Having no-one to support you and with whom you can share your feelings and emotions
- Having relationship problems with friends, family and colleagues

- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs.

Working through trauma can be scary, painful, and potentially retraumatizing. Because of the risk of retraumatization, this healing work is best done with the help of an experienced trauma specialist.

Finding the right therapist may take some time. It's very important that the therapist you choose has experience treating trauma. But the quality of the relationship with your therapist is equally important. Choose a trauma specialist you feel comfortable with. Trust your instincts. If you don't feel safe, respected, or understood, find another therapist. There should be a sense of trust and warmth between you and your trauma therapist.

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“HOW PEOPLE *Live* MATTERS”

... it really does.

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Just as the body goes into shock after a physical trauma, so does the human psyche go into shock after the impact of a major loss.

Anne Grant

What is PTSD? (Posttraumatic stress disorder)

PTSD is a clinical condition that may develop in some people following exposure to a traumatic event. The chance of developing PTSD depends on the type of event experienced, but about 5 to 10% of Australians will suffer from PTSD at some point in their lives.

PTSD involves three main groups of symptoms:

- Re-experiencing the trauma in the form of intrusive memories, nightmares or flashbacks;
- Avoidance of reminders and numbing of emotional responsiveness
- Hyperarousal—feeling jumpy and on edge.

PTSD is very distressing and can lead to serious ongoing problems with social relationships and the ability to work or carry out normal daily activities. PTSD usually requires professional assistance as these problems tend not to resolve by themselves with the passage of time.

Depression, anxiety disorders (such as panic, phobias, and general anxiety) and alcohol or drug disorders may also develop following trauma in some people. These conditions may occur with, or in the absence of, PTSD.

https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/trauma/

The Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health website contains useful information for trauma survivors, their families, and health practitioners. (www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au)

Free copies of consumer and practitioner versions of the Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Adults with Acute Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder can be downloaded. (These guidelines are also available from www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/mh13syn.htm)

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Roast Cauliflower Salad with Pork Cutlets

Ingredients

- 450g cauliflower, cut into large florets
- 2 teaspoons dried chilli flakes
- 4 pork cutlets, French trimmed, excess fat removed
- 2 bunches English spinach
- 5g (1/2 cup) raisins
- 1/4 cup fresh oregano leaves

Method

1. Preheat oven to 200C. Place the cauliflower in a roasting pan. Spray with olive oil. Sprinkle with chilli flakes. Season. Roast for 30 minutes or until slightly golden.

2. Meanwhile, season both sides of the pork. Heat a non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Spray with olive oil. Cook pork for 4-5 minutes each side for medium or until cooked to your liking. Transfer to a plate. Cover and set aside for 5 minutes to rest.

3. Toss the spinach in the frying pan over medium heat for 1 minute or until spinach just wilts. Season.

4. Combine the cauliflower, raisins and oregano in a bowl. Divide the spinach and pork among plates. Top with cauliflower salad

