

TRAUMA

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS STRUGGLING WITH SUICIDAL IDEATION, CALL OR TEXT 24/7 TO GET SUPPORT.

988
SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE

988
LÍNEA DE
PREVENCIÓN
DEL SUICIDIO
Y CRISIS

What is Trauma?

The word “trauma” means wound, shock, or injury. Psychological trauma is a person’s experience of emotional distress resulting from an event that overwhelms the capacity to make sense of it. The event may be a one-time occurrence, or a series of occurrences perceived as seriously harmful or life-threatening to oneself or loved ones. It is important to note that people process experiences differently, and not everyone has the same reaction to any event; what one person experiences as trauma may not cause distress for another. Traumatic experiences can undermine a person’s sense of safety in the world and create a sense that catastrophe could strike at any time. Parental loss in childhood, motor vehicle accidents, physical violence, sexual assault, military combat experiences, earthquakes, the unexpected loss of a loved one—any sudden, violent disruption—are events that can lead to trauma. People typically replay the experience in their mind over and over and continually think about what happened. The experience leads to changes in brain function marked by hypersensitivity to threats.

Types of Trauma

Acute trauma reflects intense distress in the immediate aftermath of a one-time event of short duration. The reaction itself is short-term, resolving on its own or with the help of counseling. A car crash, physical or sexual assault, the sudden death of a loved one, or even a medical emergency can create acute trauma.

Chronic trauma refers to the harmful effects of events that are repeated or prolonged. It can develop in response to persistent bullying, neglect, abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual), and domestic violence. Because of its repeated nature and inescapability, chronic trauma often has serious mental health consequences for individuals.

Complex trauma can arise from experiencing repeated or multiple traumatic events of differing types from which there is no possibility of escape, such as repeated child abuse. The sense of being trapped is a feature of the experience. Like other types of trauma, it can undermine a sense of safety in the world and can lead to hypervigilance, and constant monitoring of the environment for the possibility of threat. Complex trauma experienced in childhood has been associated with the development of borderline personality disorder as well as PTSD.

Resources

- www.healthadvocate.com/site/ Our EAP
- [Find Trauma and PTSD Group Therapy and Support Groups in San Jose, CA- Psychology Today](#)
- [Find Therapists and Psychologists in San Jose, CA - Psychology Today](#)





Effects of Trauma

Disturbing events activate the amygdala, a structure in the brain responsible for detecting threats. It responds by sending out an alarm to multiple body systems to prepare for defense. The sympathetic nervous system jumps into action, stimulating the release of adrenaline, noradrenaline, and stress hormones that prepare the body for a fight-flight-or-freeze response. Short-term fear, anxiety, shock, and anger/aggression are all normal responses to trauma. Such negative feelings dissipate as the crisis diminishes and the experience fades from memory, but for some people, the distressing feelings can linger, interfering with day-to-day life. Sufferers of long-term trauma may develop emotional disturbances, such as extreme anxiety, anger, sadness, survivor's guilt, disassociation, the inability to feel pleasure, or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). The amygdala becomes hyperactive, its overreaction to minor situations leads to an outpouring of stress hormones. Living in defense mode, and always waiting on the possibility of threat, people may experience ongoing problems with sleep or physical pain, encounter turbulence in their personal and professional relationships, and feel a diminished sense of self-worth.

Treatments for Trauma

It is important to remember that most people will recover from the feelings of distress that typically accompany a traumatic experience. Symptoms will lessen with time—for some, it will take days; for others, weeks; and still others, a few months. Two of the most important elements fostering recovery are the establishment of a sense of safety and the provision of social support. In addition, lifestyle factors can promote recovery. Eating healthy, exercising, avoiding alcohol and drugs, getting enough sleep, seeing loved ones regularly, and engaging in self-care can help relieve trauma symptoms. Talking about the event, especially sharing feelings with others who underwent the experience, may also be helpful. If symptoms of Trauma persist it may be wise to seek professional help.

How to Support Someone Experiencing

One of the best ways to support someone who has experienced trauma is to spend time with them and not avoid them. Companionship can be healing.

It is also important to:

- Acknowledge the event and their reaction to it.
- Listen to the person if they want to talk about it, even if they want to repeat details many times. But don't force them to talk about it.
- Accept their feelings; don't judge them.
- Encourage them to join you for fun and positive activities.
- Keep reaching out to them.

What NOT To Do:

- Do not force someone to talk.
- Do not ask intrusive questions.
- Avoid asking questions that begin with "why"; they can sound victim-blaming.
- Do not advise unless asked specifically.
- Do not resort to trivializing cliches such as "everything happens for a reason" or "I know just how you feel."

