

WHAT IS & IS NOT TRAUMA

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Intro and cowardly disclaimers

Definitions of trauma

Traditional understanding: A life threatening event (or an event which could seriously injure/damage a person) activating the person's internal alarm system (fight or flight) and overwhelms the person's mental, emotional and spiritual resources.

Current understanding: (Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps the Score*)

1. An event which overwhelms the central nervous system and changes the way the person remembers and reacts to things that remind them of the event/experience.
2. When our fight or flight alarm system is activated (affecting the whole person) and the person does not quickly recover or return to a pre-experience level of calm.
3. Something that happens to a person which is overwhelming and significantly damages or destroys the foundation(s) for the person's sense of safety.

Types of trauma:

1. Acute or single episode trauma
2. Complex or Relational trauma
3. Environmental trauma
4. Developmental trauma

Factors affecting the resolution of significantly upsetting or overwhelming events:

1. Was the person alone (or feel alone) or was there someone with them?
2. Is the event/experience outside the person's beliefs of what was possible or not?
3. Does the person lack internal resources or have significant internal coping resources?
4. Does the person lack supportive relationships or have a strong support network?

Key Symptom Clusters of PTSD (other handout is a more comprehensive symptoms list)

1. Re-experiencing
2. Avoiding
3. Hyper-arousal (reactivation of the alarm system)
4. Cognitive / emotional negativity (Negative view of self, distrust of others, etc.)

Just because a person experiences a traumatic event does not mean they were "traumatized" "damaged" or have/will have "PTSD"

[If you think you have been experiencing the challenges of unresolved trauma over the past few months or years, please seek professional help. It doesn't usually just go away.]

Some challenges that are not trauma (necessarily):

1. Stress / stressful events / difficulties & hardships
2. Losses
3. Failure

"Techniques" used to turn other challenges into trauma:

1. Awful-izing and Catastrophizing
2. Offense seeking (think, micro-aggressions, or personalizing other's criticisms)
3. All or Nothing thinking
4. Rigid expectations of self, others and life circumstances

"Hope means to keep living amid desperation, and to keep humming in the darkness."
— Henri J. M. Nouwen

"We must stop regarding unpleasant or unexpected things as interruptions of real life. The truth is that interruptions are real life." - C.S. Lewis

"Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."
— G.K. Chesterton

Resilience

Resilience defined:

Resilience is the ability to adapt to difficult situations. When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you still experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning — both physically and psychologically. However, resilience isn't about putting up with something difficult, being stoic or figuring it out on your own. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key part of being resilient. (Mayo Clinic)

Keys for Building and Strengthening Resiliency:

- Develop deep and supportive relationships (two-way streets)
- Believe what Scripture says about this world and life in the flesh - expect hardship!
- Find joy, beauty, peace and JESUS in the suffering.
- Refuse to give in to either / or thinking
- Live in gratitude
- Walk in a spirit of love, peace and forgiving-ness
- Trust in God. (versus trusting in God to bring about a certain kind of situation)

"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." - Peter (the Apostle)

"I say these things so that, in Me, you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble (tribulation). But take heart. I have overcome the world." - Jesus (THE LORD of Lords)

Some passages that I marinated in as I worked on this material:

Deuteronomy 31:6 Proverbs 3:5-6 Matthew 24 John 16:33 Romans 8:17 Romans 12:1 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 1 Corinthians 10:31 Galatians 2:20 Galatians 6:9 Ephesians 6:10-13 James 1:2-4

Recommended books:

The Bible [by various] ;)

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van Der Kolk

The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves by Kurt Thompson

The Betrayal Bond by Patrick J. Carnes

Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World by Gerald Sittser

The Coddling of the American Mind by Greg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt

Intrusive memories

Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:

- Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event
- Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)
- Upsetting dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of the traumatic event

Avoidance

Symptoms of avoidance may include:

- Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
- Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event

Negative changes in thinking and mood

Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:

- Negative thoughts about yourself, other people or the world
- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships
- Feeling detached from family and friends
- Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Difficulty experiencing positive emotions
- Feeling emotionally numb

Changes in physical and emotional reactions

Symptoms of changes in physical and emotional reactions (also called arousal symptoms) may include:

- Being easily startled or frightened
- Always being on guard for danger
- Self-destructive behavior, (e.g., drink too much or drive too fast)
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior
- Overwhelming guilt or shame

For children 6 years old and younger, signs and symptoms may also include:

- Re-enacting the traumatic event or aspects of the traumatic event through play
- Frightening dreams that may or may not include aspects of the traumatic event

Intensity of symptoms

PTSD symptoms can vary in intensity over time. You may have more PTSD symptoms when you're stressed in general, or when you come across reminders of what you went through. For example, you may hear a car backfire and relive combat experiences. Or you may see a report on the news about a sexual assault and feel overcome by memories of your own assault.

When to see a doctor

If you have disturbing thoughts and feelings about a traumatic event for more than a month, if they're severe, or if you feel you're having trouble getting your life back under control, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. Getting treatment as soon as possible can help prevent PTSD symptoms from getting worse.

If you have suicidal thoughts

If you or someone you know has suicidal thoughts, get help right away through one or more of these resources:

- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, a spiritual leader or someone in your faith community.
- Call a suicide hotline number — in the United States, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) to reach a trained counselor. Use that same number and press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.
- Make an appointment with your doctor or a mental health professional.

When to get emergency help

If you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

If you know someone who's in danger of attempting suicide or has made a suicide attempt, make sure someone stays with that person to keep him or her safe. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately. Or, if you can do so safely, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room.