



What is trauma?

We all respond to injury in different ways. Trauma is the emotional response when an injury overwhelms us.

The injury could be physical, sexual or emotional. Some of the most common traumatic events include:

- physical assault
- sexual assault, including childhood sexual abuse
- verbal assault
- being threatened with physical or sexual assault
- witnessing violence against others
- long-term neglect in childhood.

How can trauma affect people?

TRAUMA CAN AFFECT THE WAY YOU FEEL.

You may experience some or all of the following:

- too much emotion
- too little or no emotion
- depression
- feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless
- shame, fear
- anger, rage
- grief, sadness
- anxiety, panic attacks.

TRAUMA CAN AFFECT YOUR ABILITY TO HAVE SATISFYING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS.

You may experience some of the following:

- not knowing how to trust
- difficulty being close to people
- problems in sexual relationships
- fear of others
- isolation and withdrawal
- not recognizing when you are in a dangerous situation
- not knowing how to give and take in relationships
- repeatedly searching for someone to rescue you.

TRAUMA CAN AFFECT YOUR BODY.

You may:

- feel as if you were reliving the traumatic experience (these body memories and flashbacks can include seeing images, hearing voices or sounds, smelling odours, as well as unexplained tastes and physical sensations)
- have sleep problems, including nightmares
- have physical complaints (e.g., headaches, nausea, stomach aches, pelvic pain, stomach/digestive problems) for which no medical cause can be identified
- feel physically exhausted.

TRAUMA CAN AFFECT THE WAY YOU THINK.

You may have:

- problems with attention and concentration
- confused thinking
- thoughts that get in the way of daily activities
- memory problems.

TRAUMA CAN AFFECT THE WAY YOU BEHAVE.

It can lead you to:

- inflict self-injury (e.g., cutting, burning)
- engage in behaviours such as self-starvation, binge-eating, alcohol and other drug misuse
- constantly look for sexual relationships, or avoid sexual relationships
- abuse others.

People who experience repeated trauma tend to suffer more severe effects. Also, the younger people were when they experienced the trauma, the more severe the effects will likely be.

Can people “forget” that they experienced trauma, and later remember?

Yes. Research has shown that some people forget that they were abused or traumatized. Often, when something is too traumatic, it is forgotten but not lost from memory. This is especially so when the source of the trauma is another person. Sometimes, traumatic events are remembered later. When this happens, the person has often experienced something that reminds her or him of an original traumatic event.

For many people who receive mental health services, trauma remains unrecognized as an important factor in their mental illness.

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