



# Identifying and Managing Trauma

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*Experiencing multiple traumas at the same time is stressful and can leave people feeling out of control.*

## **It is important to:**

- ▶ Communicate your experiences
- ▶ Expand your understanding of how this affects you and others
- ▶ Find a common sense of meaning
- ▶ Identify and develop coping skills

# What is Trauma?

**Individual Trauma** results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

**Collective Trauma** is cultural, historical, insidious, political and economic trauma that impacts individuals and communities across generations.

Trauma changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think.

## Trauma and the Brain

The most important job of the brain is to ensure survival, even under the most miserable conditions. Our brains are built from the bottom up starting with the emotional part. When we experience trauma, this part of the brain reacts first—well before the rational part.

The emotional brain can be activated not only by trauma itself, but by the stimuli that trigger traumatic memories—a smell or a sound, for example. When we are faced with a traumatic event or traumatic memories, the emotional parts of our brains protect us by overtaking the rational parts of our brains.



# 3 Stages of Trauma Recovery:

1

**Safety and Stabilization:** Regaining a sense of safety in our own bodies and relationships with others.

2

**Remembrance and Mourning:** Processing the trauma, putting words and emotions to it and making meaning of it.

3

**Reconnection and Integration:** Creating a new sense of self and a new future involving redefining oneself in the context of meaningful relationships.

We have the ability to regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain, through such basic activities as breathing, moving and touching.

# Check your Temperature

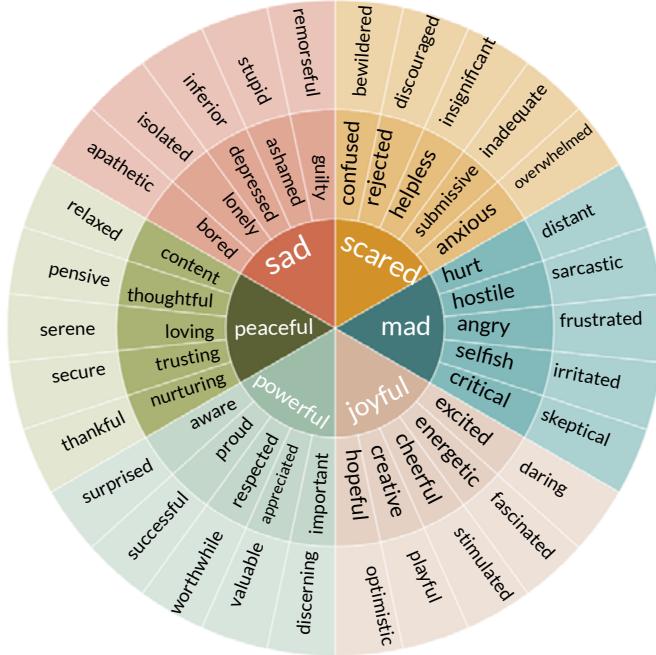
Just as checking your physical temperature is a way to assess your physical health, checking your emotional and mental temperature is a way to see how much trauma has affected you.

Here are some things to consider as you “check your temperature”:

- ▶ **Physical:** Muscles Aches, Pain, Fatigue
- ▶ **Emotional:** Anger, Sadness, Fear
- ▶ **Mental:** Anxiety, Depression, Ruminating Thoughts

Begin with a self-check.

- ▶ **Stop:** Closing your eyes can allow you to focus, or you can always lower and half-close your eyes.
- ▶ **Breathe:** Bring awareness to the body by breathing in and out. Slowly count to five and then count back down to one.
- ▶ **Scan:** When you are ready, intentionally breathe in, and move your attention to whatever part of your mind or body you want to investigate.
- ▶ **Identify:** What are you feeling emotionally, physically or mentally? Identifying the pain point allows room for recovery.  
*Note: You can reference the feelings wheel on the next page during this exercise.*
- ▶ **Accept:** Your willingness and ability to accept the emotional, mental or physical experience assists in the ability to acknowledge, absorb and lose its destructive power.



Identify what might be causing you to feel the way that you are, so that you can give yourself the support you need.

### Temperature Checked, Now What?

- ▶ **Physically-** Take a walk, listen to music, drink water, speak positive affirmations to yourself, or pick up the phone and talk it out.
- ▶ **Emotionally-** Cry if necessary (get it out), think of one thing to be grateful for, or write how you are feeling down.
- ▶ **Mentally-** Feed your mind positivity (give yourself a news or social media break), quiet your mind (meditate or pray), surround yourself with positive people, avoid alcohol and other drugs, and ask for help.

# The ABC's of Self-care Following Trauma or Violence:

Awareness

A

- ▶ Be aware of your emotions and behavioral reactions to trauma. Remind yourself that stress reactions after a disaster are common. Most reactions fade with time. If they don't, reach out to the EAP, SAP or MAP for assistance.
- ▶ Recognize that you may be dealing with many forms of loss, such as loss of expectations for the future or beliefs about your safety. Journaling your thoughts and feelings may help. Creative activities can provide comfort.
- ▶ Give yourself a break from thinking about what has happened and what might happen next. Try to concentrate on the positive aspects of your life. A gratitude journal can help provide hope and contentment.
- ▶ Find balance between work and play. Set up a specific area for work. Close the door at the end of the day and focus on time with family and friends.
- ▶ Take time to care for yourself as well as others. Get enough sleep to feel well rested. Going to bed and getting up at consistent times is beneficial. Eat well-balanced meals. Exercise daily to reduce stress. Nurture yourself with calming activities like meditation, deep breathing, or progressive relaxation. Schedule quiet time for reflection.
- ▶ Structure your time. Choose activities that engage your mind and body and keep you in the present. Set short-term goals to stay on track.

Balance

B



- ▶ Spend time with or help others. Traumatic events are unique in that many people are affected. Connecting with family and friends may help you realize you are not the only one affected. This gives you a chance to provide support which lifts your mood and makes you feel less alone.
- ▶ Take a time out if you're feeling angry. The stress following trauma or violence can create irritability and anger. This anger can affect your health, sense of self-control, and relationships. Take a break to calm down when you experience anger. This may help you preserve your health and relationships.
- ▶ Get your facts about the trauma or experience from a reliable, objective source. Don't rely on rumors or guesswork. Limit your intake of media related to the crisis. Overexposure only increases stress.

The period following trauma or violence can be very stressful for survivors and others who may be involved. Taking steps to manage stress and cope with the fear can help resolve some of the challenges. Some steps focus on support from others and helping others. Other strategies involve problem-solving skills and shifting your thoughts or outlook.

**If the stress reaction persists, contact your Perspectives EAP, SAP or MAP for support.**

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