

## What does Trauma mean?

When thinking about a person's mental health, Trauma can be described as an emotional wound or shock that often has long-lasting effects on the mind and body. This can be caused by an overwhelming, life-threatening, terrible or frightening experience.

These experiences can be hard to understand, adjust to or cope with. Any event or incident can be considered traumatic if it is very upsetting, scary, shocking or causes physical or emotional harm directly to you, or indirectly to someone else.

As individuals we cope and manage with situations differently, we experience situations differently and cope differently. There is no right or wrong way to respond to difficult, upsetting or frightening experiences. It is also important to remember that not everyone who experiences a difficult or traumatic event will experience psychological trauma (or PTSD). It is normal to feel upset and feel like you are struggling to cope.

A person may experience trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a single upsetting or frightening incident, or many traumatic events. People who are experiencing trauma may experience symptoms such as:

- Flashbacks (this is when a person may feel or act as though a traumatic event is happening again)
- Nightmares
- Anxiety and feeling 'on edge'
- Up and down emotions (maybe feeling tearful, irritable or numb)

Symptoms can often last many weeks or months and impact how you cope with every day. Activities such as seeing friends, going to school, sleeping and eating are affected.

## How might it make me feel?

When we experience a traumatic experience it can flood our normal stress management ability, meaning our memory of the trauma is fragmented (broken into pieces) and filed in different areas of our brain. This means our memories may be out of order and messy which makes it difficult to recall and talk about. Some of these 'pieces' of the traumatic memories can be easily triggered by things like smells, physical sensations, things we see. This can trigger our emotions and make it feel like you are experiencing the traumatic event all over again. This can feel very real and very frightening.

Physical reactions to extreme stress and trauma may look like the following:

- **Fight** – feeling very angry and upset and you need to get these feelings out of your body and keep the thing that you feel threatened by away from you.
- **Flight** – feeling like you need to run away or get out of a situation that feels threatening or dangerous.
- **Freeze** – feeling so frightened and scared that your body does not know what to do so it just stays still, finds somewhere to hide or might curl up into a ball.

**FIGHT**



**FLIGHT** Oohtala!



**FREEZE**



You might also have difficulties and struggle with:

- Intense and quick changing emotions, such as swinging from feeling ok to feeling upset, angry, confused, on edge, anxious, or even numb.
- Feeling physically unwell such as sick, heart racing, breathing quicker.
- Having disrupted sleep not being able to get to sleep, or stay asleep, or sleeping too much.
- Losing your appetite.
- Changes to how sociable you are. Not wanting to be with others, or not wanting to be on your own.
- Finding it hard to concentrate on things and not being interested in stuff that you used to care about.

All these things are understandable and normal when you've been through a really tough time. For most people these difficulties and changes will only last a few days or weeks. With love and support from those around you, you will adjust and cope.

If you are experiencing symptoms like these, including the ones previously mentioned, and they have lasted longer than a month, it might be a good idea to get some help.

## Is there anything that can help me feel better?

### TOP TIPS

1. It is important to remember that everyone copes with things differently. If you are struggling to cope after a traumatic event, it is important to let someone know and get some help, support and advice. Talk to someone you trust such as a parent, carer, teacher or your GP.
2. There are many strategies and techniques to help you cope with flashbacks and anxiety. Take a look at some of the Apps and websites suggested below.
3. Some people find it helpful to keep a log of when they experience trauma symptoms (such as flashbacks) to notice if there are patterns or triggers (things or situations that are more likely to make a flashback happen). If you notice patterns or triggers, this might help you to make a plan of how to manage these situations if they come up.
4. Having hobbies, interests and spending time with friends can be really helpful when you are experiencing symptoms of trauma. They can be a good distraction. Try to plan regular time to do activities and see friends.
5. If things feel like they are getting out of control, you could try some Grounding Techniques. Think of your 5 senses and find something for each one that you like. For example, listen to some music you enjoy, or light a scented candle, or you could watch a film that makes you laugh.



## Where can I go for advice and support?

Talk to someone you like and trust. You could also talk to your GP. Your GP might refer you to a service like CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) to see how they can help. They may also have some other ideas of services/charities in your local area that could help support you with your symptoms and feelings; as well as explore the trauma you might have been through.

Therapy, such as speaking to a counsellor or therapist can be a good long term solution. They'll listen to your problems and experiences and think sensitively with you about them. Some may also give you some strategies of how to cope and manage how you are currently feeling.

If you can't talk to someone you know you can use helplines, text services, apps and/or websites, take a look at the ones in our accompanying leaflet