

# BETRAYAL TRAUMA, HYPER-AROUSAL & PTSD

## Signs & Symptoms

Betrayal trauma—especially in intimate relationships—can activate the body's survival response and keep your nervous system on **high alert**.



### 1. HYPER-AROUSAL SYMPTOMS

(FIGHT / FLIGHT ACTIVATION)

Body-based, survival-driven responses.

- Constant anxiety or feeling “on edge”
- Irritability or anger outbursts (often disproportionate to the situation)
- Difficulty relaxing or “coming down”
- Hypervigilance (scanning for threats, checking behaviors, suspicion)
- Exaggerated startle response (easily startled)
- Sleep disturbances (trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or restless sleep)
- Racing thoughts / inability to shut off the mind



### 2. COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

Impact how a person thinks, interprets, and feels.

- Intrusive thoughts about the betrayal (images, replaying conversations, mental “loops”)
- Obsessive questioning (“What else don’t I know?” “Was any of it real?”)
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Emotional flooding (waves of grief, rage, panic)
- Shame, self-blame, or feeling “not enough”
- Loss of identity or sense of self
- Distrust of self (intuition feels unreliable)



### 3. RELATIONAL / ATTACHMENT SYMPTOMS

Impact attachment and safety in relationships.

- Intense fear of abandonment or further betrayal
- Clinging behaviors OR emotional withdrawal (often both, in cycles)
- Compulsive checking (phones, accounts, whereabouts)
- Difficulty feeling safe even when reassurance is given
- Testing behaviors (“Will you prove it?”)
- Loss of emotional intimacy or sexual connection
- Heightened sensitivity to perceived rejection



### 4. PHYSIOLOGICAL / SOMATIC SYMPTOMS

The body often “holds” the trauma.

- Tight chest, shallow breathing
- Increased heart rate or palpitations
- Gastrointestinal distress (nausea, appetite changes)
- Muscle tension (especially neck, shoulders, jaw)
- Fatigue (from chronic nervous system activation)



### 5. BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

What people do in response to hyper-arousal.

- Compulsive information-seeking (interrogation, searching for evidence)
- Avoidance of triggers OR (nability to stop engaging them)
- Over-control (trying to manage partner/environment to feel safe)
- Rumination cycle (can’t “let it go” even when wanting to)
- Increased use of coping behaviors (which can include addiction relapse in some cases)



### 6. IMPORTANT CLINICAL NOTE

Betrayal trauma often includes a push-pull dynamic:

*“I need closeness to feel safe.”*  
*“Closeness is what hurt me.”*

That internal conflict is what makes the hyper-arousal feel so intense and confusing.



### HOW THIS DIFFERS SLIGHTLY FROM CLASSIC PTSD



Ongoing exposure (not a single past event)



Attachment injury (trauma from a primary relationship)



Re-triggering through continued interaction with the partner



### HOPE & HEALING

Your nervous system is doing its job—just stuck in overdrive. Healing happens through regulation, safety, and support.

### FOCUS ON REGULATION BEFORE RESOLUTION



GROUNDING



SELF-COMPASSION



NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION



SAFE CONNECTIONS



TIME & PATIENCE