

What is Trauma?



Trauma: A powerful emotional response to a distressing event, such as war, an accident, the unexpected loss of a loved one, or abuse. Trauma can continue to cause both emotional and physical symptoms for many years after the event has concluded.

Trauma Risk Factors

- ✓ The traumatic experience was unexpected.
- ✓ The victim has experienced past traumas.
- ✓ The experience happened repeatedly, or over a prolonged period of time.
- ✓ The trauma occurred during childhood.
- ✓ Feeling of helplessness during the experience.
- ✓ The victim is dealing with other major stressors, unrelated to the trauma.



Symptoms of Trauma

Everyone's experience with trauma is unique. Some people will develop every symptom, while others develop very few. The following list of symptoms is not comprehensive, and should not be used to form a diagnosis.

avoidance of trauma reminders, including memories	exaggerated startle response	irritability, anger, and other negative emotions
flashbacks to the traumatic event	distressing dreams and other sleep problems	self-blame regarding the traumatic event

Treating Trauma



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a common and well-supported treatment for trauma disorders. CBT works by identifying and challenging unhealthy thinking patterns that contribute to the symptoms of trauma. The benefits of CBT can be long-lasting.



Exposure Therapy

During exposure therapy, the patient is exposed to reminders of their trauma in a gradual and safe way. With enough exposure, the trauma begins to lose its emotional power, and the symptoms diminish. Exposure therapies have extensive research support.



Medication

Medication may be used to manage the symptoms of trauma, such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia. Medication can be especially valuable when a person's symptoms are so intense that they are unable to participate in psychotherapy.



Other Treatments

Many other treatments, such as Narrative Exposure Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and group therapy have all been found to be helpful for survivors of trauma. It's always ok to ask your therapist what treatments they use.