



Wellbeing | Hub

0300 123 9193

A large orange silhouette of a human head in profile, facing left. The interior of the head is filled with a mosaic of white and orange geometric shapes, representing a brain. A horizontal blue band cuts across the middle of the head, containing the word 'TRAUMA' in white capital letters.

TRAUMA

**A SELF-HELP GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA**



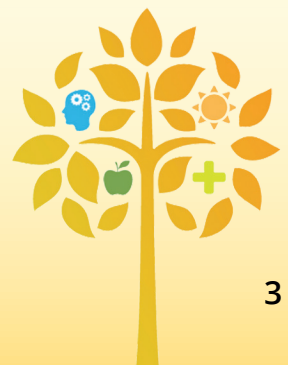
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What is Trauma?

Trauma is an event or an experience which may be deeply disturbing or distressing. It is important to know that what one person finds traumatic, another person may not. Each person is an individual and will experience events differently. Therefore, there is no definitive list of traumatic events; what is more important is how the event is perceived and experienced by the individual.

Some common examples that people may find traumatic are going through a divorce, bereavement, assault, violence, sexual assault, torture, natural disaster, terrorist attack, loss of employment, personal injury or illness, exposure to human remains or serious accidents.



Signs and Symptoms of Trauma

Immediately after the traumatic event, people can often feel shock or denial. When in shock an individual may feel numb or stunned. They may feel cut off from feelings or the reality of the situation. When an individual feels denial, they may find it difficult to accept what has happened or may not believe that it has happened. Sometimes people can come across as being “strong” or unaffected by the event when they are experiencing denial.

After feelings of shock and denial have subsided, it is common to experience a wide range of symptoms. It is important to remember the following examples are normal reactions to a traumatic incident, it is not exhaustive and you do not have to experience every symptom on the list following a traumatic event. Sometimes people start to experience symptoms soon after the event, whereas others start to experience them later on.

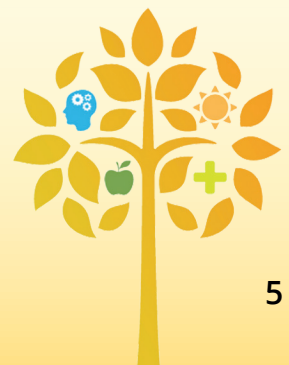
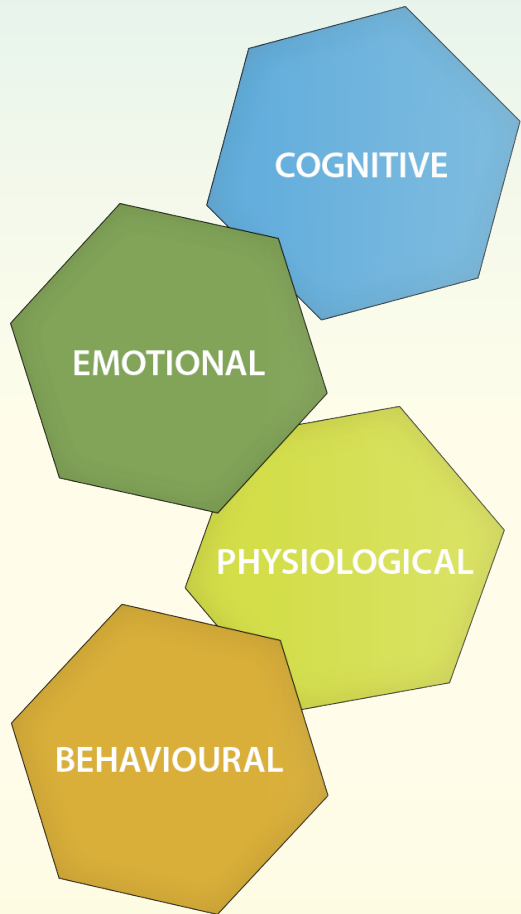
Cognitive

- Flashbacks
- Intrusive images or thoughts of the trauma
- Unable to make decisions
- Struggling to concentrate/focus
- Racing thoughts
- Ruminating on the event or something related to the event
- Having nightmares
- Constantly thinking about the event
- Not thinking about the event at all
- Angry and/or critical thoughts
- Worrying

- Thinking about the “what ifs” and “why”
- Questioning the meaning of life or your existence
- Blaming yourself or others

Emotional

- Isolated
- Scared
- Anxious
- Nervous
- Guilt
- Shame
- Unsettled
- On edge
- Unreal
- Detached
- Low mood
- Angry
- On guard
- Hopeless
- Confused
- Numb
- Out of control
- Negative about self
- Suicidal



Physiological

- Heart racing
- Tight chest
- Dizzy
- Nausea
- Stiff
- Tired
- Aching
- Butterflies
- Hot/cold
- Problems sleeping
- Crying

Behavioural

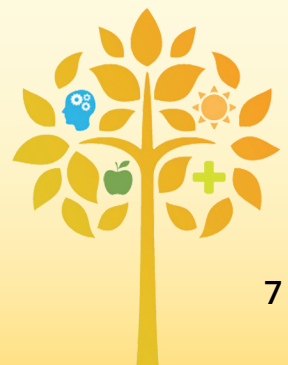
- Unable to be still/quiet
- Unable to be alone
- Unable to be with others
- Avoiding things that remind you of the event
- Snappy and irritable
- Having arguments with others
- Depending on others
- Using destructive substances or activities to cope i.e. alcohol, drugs, gambling
- Disrupted relationships
- Self-harm

What do I do if I have experienced trauma?

The following are some strategies that may be helpful to recover from a traumatic experience. Each person's recovery from trauma may differ; this is not an exhaustive list of helpful strategies. It is important that you use strategies that work well for you.

Give yourself time

It is important to remember that following a traumatic event you are very likely to experience some of the signs and symptoms listed previously. You may experience these difficulties but that does not mean there is something wrong with you, it does not mean that you are going crazy, that you are weak, that you cannot handle your job or life, or that you will never feel better again and that you will never be able to handle a crisis. Your mind and your body are trying to heal from a psychological injury and this takes time. If you are experiencing these difficulties, then give yourself permission to experience them without judgement or criticism. These symptoms will subside over time. You are having a very normal reaction!



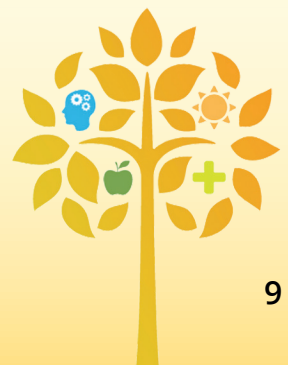
Process the experience

Sometimes when we experience a traumatic event, it is our gut reaction to avoid it because it is too painful or scary. We may try to avoid thinking about the event, try to avoid our feelings or thoughts about the event, or try to avoid anything that reminds us of the event. However, it is important that we allow ourselves to process the event so that we can heal.

Here are some helpful ways to process the event and take back control over the thoughts that may be distressing:

- Find out as much information about the event as possible so you have a full understanding of the event and are not left wondering about it. You can do this by speaking to other people who were there, getting facts from reliable sources, or following up with other organisations that were involved.
- Tell someone you trust or write down your memory of the event, including your thoughts and feelings. When you speak to someone else about a very traumatic event, it is important that the other person feels comfortable to hear the details of the event. It is important to remember that you do not always have to talk about the details of the event, sometimes talking about your feelings and thoughts can be just as helpful. Only speak about this when you feel ready.

- If you are having intrusive thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks, take time each day to think about them. Find a comfortable and safe place and allow yourself 10-20 minutes to focus on the details of the intrusive thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks. It may also be helpful to tell someone you trust about them or write them down. By designating time to focus on them, you are taking back control over your mind when it focuses on the things that are difficult, rather than them intruding your mind and thoughts.
- If you find it difficult to talk, or write down the details of the event, you can find other ways to express or communicate your experience. Some people find creative ways of expression such as art or music.
- Try to consider if you are avoiding something to do with the event. This could be thoughts or feelings, talking about the events, or avoiding things, situations and people that remind you of the event. Avoiding things may prevent you from moving on. Therefore, consider the different factors that you are avoiding and set small achievable goals to try to face these fears. Write a list of the different things you are scared of, starting with the least scary and try to face them. Ask for help and support to do this if you need to. Do not rush yourself in this step; take it slowly.



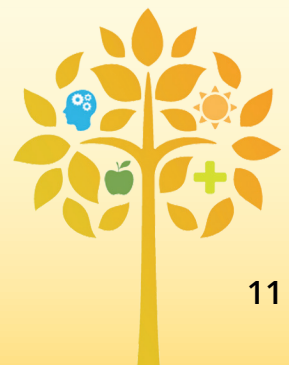
Distress tolerance

After a traumatic event you may find some of your experiences quite distressing, your emotions might be quite overwhelming, or your thoughts may be too painful.

There are some techniques that might help you cope with this:

- Distraction can be a helpful tool in times of distress or if you find yourself ruminating. You can find an object in the room, something that is not associated with the event and focus on the object. Think about all the different aspects of this object - what does it look like? What does it feel like? What is it made from? What is it used for? You could also start an activity that you need to use the focus of your mind for, such as a word search or puzzle or writing a list. Distraction techniques usually take at least 3 minutes before distressing symptoms start to reduce.
 - It is important to note that distraction techniques are not a way of avoiding the event or feelings and thoughts associated, it is about you finding ways to cope with very distressing symptoms and controlling when you think about and process the event.

- Grounding techniques can also be helpful in times of distress. Find a small object such as a shell, a marble, a scented stress ball, or another object that engages the senses and carry it with you. In times of distressing thoughts or emotions use the object to ground you. Focus on the object in relation to all five senses: smell, sight, touch, sound, taste. Ways of being self-compassionate include:
- Mindful breathing can help to regulate your body in times of distress and return you to normal levels of arousal. To do this, sit with your eyes closed, in a comfortable position and safe place, with your spine relatively straight. Bring your attention to your breathing, focusing on drawing in long breaths through your nose all the way to the bottom of your stomach, and then slowly release your breath out through your mouth. Try to focus your thoughts on your breath. If other thoughts enter your mind during this time, do not judge or criticise them or yourself. Acknowledge these thoughts and then go back to focusing on your breathing.
- When you have experienced trauma there can be a lot of tension in your body. This is due to the stress response (fight or flight) and experiencing very intense emotions. Therefore, there is a lot of tension and sometimes, unused energy in your body. Healthy ways of releasing this include relaxation such as yoga, mindful breathing, meditation and other activities you find relaxing or some light exercise. Relaxation techniques are most effective when practiced daily, even if for a short period.



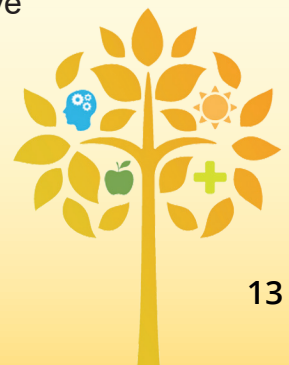
- Following a traumatic event, it is common for people to feel very angry. Sometimes this anger is directed at ourselves or at others. It is understandable that you feel angry and it is ok that you do. A healthy way of expressing this anger without hurting yourself or others is to acknowledge it and speak to others.

Self-care

One of the most important things to remember when you are trying to recover from a traumatic experience is to take care of yourself and engage in healthy behaviours:

- **Use your support network:** ask family and friends for support. Do not be afraid to ask for help - we all need love and care when we are experiencing difficulties. Ask people for things you need, so they know and are not trying to guess. Try not to isolate yourself and bottle up your emotions.
- **Look after your body:** make sure that during recovery you are taking care of your body. Your mind is better able to recover if your body is healthy.
 - Try to eat a healthy and balanced diet.
 - Although sleeping may be difficult after a trauma try to get enough sleep and regularly.
 - Try to engage in exercise. This gets the body and all its functions moving and can help to expel excess energy.
- **Establish routines:** try to engage in activities and establish a routine. It is important to take time to relax and rest, but incorporate this in a healthy routine if you can. Sometimes, if we are not engaging in other activities, our mind has time to ruminate.

- **Challenge negative thinking:** after we have experienced trauma it can be easy to get caught up in negative thinking patterns. These in turn effect our feelings and our behaviour. Although it may be difficult, try to practice every day challenging your negative thoughts by coming up with alternative ones. A helpful tip is to think about what a caring friend might say to you.
- **Do the things you love:** remember to continue doing hobbies or other activities you enjoy. When we experience trauma we can find it difficult to focus on the positives. By doing the things we love, we remember that there is still joy and happiness and that we can feel good again.
- **Do not use destructive behaviours:** in times of difficulty, we may want to use substances or engage in activities which are destructive. Drinking alcohol, taking drugs, overeating, gambling, looking at porn, or engaging in high adrenaline sports are just a few examples. These may feel good in the short term as they help to numb painful emotions or let us escape from reality, but they can be very destructive and often make difficult experiences worse.
- **Do not take on too much:** after a traumatic event or experience, try not to take on too much in your personal and professional life. Tell people that you need time to recover and that you may have to reduce the pressure on you currently.
- **Do not make major life choices:** following trauma it effects our thinking, feelings, physiology and behaviour. Therefore, it is a good idea to wait until you have recovered to make any important decisions.



Treatment for Trauma

It is important to remember to give yourself time following a trauma to recover and start to feel like yourself again. Most people recover from trauma themselves and do not need treatment.

However, some of the following may indicate that you may need to access help from your GP, a healthcare professional or the Wellbeing Hub:

- You have no one to talk to
- You cannot handle your feelings/feel completely overwhelmed
- Your symptoms are not reducing after six weeks
- You are engaging in destructive behaviours
- You are unable to function day-to-day
- You are having accidents



If you feel that you need extra support, you should visit your GP. Medication is not usually prescribed as treatment for trauma, however your GP will be able to make an assessment about whether it will be helpful for you; based on your personal circumstances and considering all other aspects of your situation.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) outlines talking therapies as the most effective treatment for trauma related conditions, such as Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

They recommend the following models for treatment, which can be between 8 – 18 sessions:

Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TCBT):

during this treatment you would talk with your therapist about what happened and make sense of it - exploring your thoughts, feelings, bodily reactions and your behaviour.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):

this therapy uses the movement of the eyes to process the event.



How to contact us

This can be for a referral, support or advice; for yourself, a colleague or your team member

Telephone

You can call the Hub team on **0300 123 9193**
Monday to Friday 09:00 - 17:00 hours.

Email

you can email us at **wellbeinghub@secamb.nhs.uk**

Intranet

You can access further information about Wellbeing on our Intranet pages.

<https://secamb.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/staff/support/healthandwellbeing/Pages/default.aspx>

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