

Trauma and PTSD

Welcome

Notes:

Welcome to the Behavioral Health Awareness Module on Trauma & PTSD. Additional resources are available by selecting the Resources link in the top right corner of the window. If you have visual or auditory assistance needs, please select the Accessibility On/Off button for help with this training.

Trauma is a Fact of Life

Notes:

Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence.

In This Training...

Notes:

Everyone has experiences that are upsetting or hurtful. However, there are times when these experiences are more than just upsetting and possibly harmful. There is a difference between events that are temporarily distressful and those that are traumatic.

This table of contents provides an outline for what you will learn. In this training, we will discuss how to define trauma, the effects trauma has on an individual, post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, and treatment and recovery options for those experiencing PTSD. We invite you to explore the following chapters that address questions you may have about the topic.

You also have the option to move freely about the module using the player menu on the left hand side of the window. You are free to start, stop, or pause the module at any time.

Definition

Notes:

A trauma is any event that a person perceives as harmful or threatening and has a long-lasting



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effect on that person's well-being. A traumatic event can be something someone experiences or something they witness happening to someone else. Trauma can occur at any age; it can also occur once or be ongoing. These experiences often cause physical and emotional reactions that can last for years after the event. The effects of trauma can affect a person's relationships, work, health, and overall outlook on life.

People experience events differently. What might be traumatic for one person might not be for another. For example, many people have been in car accidents. Car accidents can be extremely unsettling, leaving some feeling shaky or upset for a few days after the event. But for others, that feeling might not go away. They may start having nightmares about the accident or even avoid getting into a car for months to years. The accident could be considered a traumatic event if it triggers a physical or an emotional reaction that lasts for a long time after the actual event. Fortunately, even if trauma has lasting effects, there are ways people can manage the consequences of trauma so they can have fulfilling and meaningful lives.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Notes:

Trauma can result from a variety of life experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the largest study of childhood trauma to date, almost two-thirds of the 17,000 people participating said that they had experienced at least one form of an adverse, or traumatic, childhood experience. Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are traumatic experiences that take place in childhood or adolescence and are remembered into adulthood. While trauma can happen to anyone, it affects certain populations more than others. Some over-represented populations include people of color and people with economic stress or who live in impoverished areas. They also include those living with substance use disorders or in a close relationship with someone who is.

ACE Statistics

Notes:

The most common adverse childhood experiences can be categorized into three groups: abuse, neglect and household dysfunction. Of the three categories, physical abuse is the most prevalent adverse childhood experience followed by household substance abuse. Click the button to view the statistics.



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Statistics Table

Ace Category		Women	Men	Total
Types of Abuse	Emotional	13.1	7.6	10.6
	Physical	27.0	29.9	28.3
	Sexual	24.7	16.0	20.7
Types of Neglect	Emotional Neglect	16.7	12.4	14.8
	Physical Neglect	9.2	10.7	9.9
Types of Household Dysfunction	Mother Treated Violently	13.7	11.5	12.7
	Household Substance Use	29.5	23.8	26.9
	Household Mental Illness	23.3	14.8	19.4
	Parental Separation or Divorce	24.5	21.8	23.3
	Incarinated Household Member	5.2	4.1	4.7

Types of Trauma

Notes:

People experience trauma through many sources. These include abuse, war, crime, natural disaster and discrimination, among others. The types presented here are not exhaustive, but they cover many common forms. Click each image to learn more about these common types of traumatic experiences.

IPV

Notes:

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to abuse caused by either a current or former partner or spouse. Physically, it could look like being pushed, shoved, kicked, beaten up, choked, or being threatened with a weapon. Sexual violence can include being forced to participate in sexual activity, participating out of fear of a consequence, or being forced into humiliating or



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degrading acts. IPV can also be emotional, including threats, intimidation, and/or behavior that is meant to control the IPV survivor. Women are more likely to experience IPV than men. Globally, 30% of women report experiencing IPV in their lifetime.

Exploitation

Notes:

Exploitation is a specific type of sexual abuse that includes human trafficking for sexual purposes or any other activity that involves the use of a child for prostitution or pornographic reasons. Further, labor trafficking refers to a child, or adult, being forced to work or engage in services that are unhealthy or harmful to them.

Discrimination

Notes:

While not thought of as a conventional source of trauma, racism and gender discrimination can have harmful long-term effects on an individual's emotional well being. Racism and gender discrimination can occur in the form of overt hate crimes or micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are the everyday verbal or nonverbal slights that target others and are hostile, negative, or degrading. Not all micro-aggressions are intentional, but many are. Racial and gender discrimination can have powerfully negative effects on an individual's mental health and view of themselves. Discrimination prevents people from enjoying their human rights and dignity.

Terror

Notes:

Acts of mass violence and terrorism such as shootings, bombings, and other attacks can be a source of trauma for children, adults, and families. These events can both physically and emotionally affect those involved. While some will need to adjust to loss, others may live in fear of their safety or worry that another event may happen again. Some will return to a normal routine after adjusting to what happened to them or their loved one, but others will experience more long-term effects of the trauma.

Abuse

Notes:

Abuse can occur in childhood or when people are adults. Anyone in a position of authority over another person has the potential to abuse the person with less power. People with authority include parents, caregivers, coaches, teachers, religious leaders, older family members, and others. Click each tab to hear about different forms of abuse.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse occurs when someone causes physical injury to another person. These injuries can include red marks, cuts, welts, bruises, sprains, or broken bones. Physical abuse can be intentional or unintentional.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse occurs when someone uses another person to meet their sexual needs without getting the other person's consent. Sexual abuse can include physical contact but does not have to. Non-touching sexual behavior includes voyeurism (trying to look at a person's naked body) and exhibitionism (displaying one's genitals in public). Exposing a child to pornography is also considered sexual abuse.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse occurs when the abuser mentally wounds another through words or actions. Effects of emotional abuse can be seen in the survivor's actions, mood, and thinking. Examples of short and long-term effects include difficulty concentrating, moodiness, nightmares, guilt, and social withdrawal.

NEGLECT ABUSE

Neglect involves failure or refusal by a caregiver or parent to meet the critical needs of a child. Neglect can appear in different ways, like failing to supervise a child appropriately, provide the child with basic needs of food or shelter, or failing to give a child needed medical attention. Neglect can lead to feelings of hopelessness and lowered self-worth for the person experiencing it.

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War

Notes:

The violence of war puts civilian populations and combat personnel under constant threat of death and injury. Often, when one thinks of trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), thoughts go to military-based combat. Over 14% of military personnel involved in combat operations in Iraq and over 9% of those deployed to Afghanistan reported symptoms of PTSD. War also causes trauma for the civilian population exposed to it. As many as one-third of refugees from the Syrian war have been identified as suffering from PTSD.

1.16 Secondary Trauma

Notes:

Secondary trauma refers to the emotional stress someone experiences when they hear about the trauma of another. This type of trauma is common among helping professionals like case managers, child welfare workers, first responders, and the friends and family of those with trauma experiences. Listening to and supporting someone takes an emotional toll that can decrease the listener's quality of life.

Self-preservation

Notes:

After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go into permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment.

The Effects of Trauma

Notes:

Trauma can affect every area of a person's life, including their physical, psychological, occupational, relational, and social well-being. These reactions sometimes do not occur until long after the event. People who are close to those who have experienced trauma can also be affected. Click each tab to take a deeper look at each of these effects.

PHYSICAL

Trauma affects the brain and the body. People who have experienced trauma are more likely to



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develop lung disease, heart disease, liver disease, and sexually transmitted infections. Trauma also leads to other health-risk behavior like smoking and substance use, which have their own negative physical effects.

Additionally, trauma has effects on the brain, especially if the experiences occur during early childhood when the brain is still developing. Trauma can limit the growth or reduce the size of brain areas that are responsible for memory and managing our response to stress. Trauma affects our brain's ability to concentrate, regulate emotions, and manage fear, causing people to have difficulties with sleep, feeling safe, and severe stress.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

When under threat, our nervous system kicks into high gear, providing us the energy we need to flee from danger, fight back against it, or freeze in place until the threat goes away. This is referred to as the fight or flight response. The "freeze" response allows us to reduce our own appearance as a threat and make ourselves less noticeable in dangerous situations. These are instinctive responses, not our choice. They just happen. But sometimes people look back on their response during a traumatic event and blame themselves. For example, someone who froze in the face of a gunman robbing them may have thoughts like, "I should have fought back." People who experience trauma might chronically deal with fight, flight, or freeze responses triggered by their stress. Additionally, the more trauma a person survives, the more likely they are to develop conditions like depression and anxiety, overuse alcohol or illegal drugs, and attempt suicide.

OCCUPATIONAL

Trauma survivors experience more challenges in the workplace compared to those who have not experienced trauma. People who have experienced trauma miss work at a higher rate and have more medical visits. Trauma survivors may also have difficulty concentrating because of how the trauma has affected their brain, making the stress of the workplace too much to navigate. Difficulties on the job can lead to lack of career progress, demotions, or even prolonged unemployment. For adolescents, trauma may affect the ability to pay attention or retain skills, leading to academic difficulties.

RELATIONAL

Severe strain can be placed on the relationships of individuals who have survived trauma. Trauma survivors often struggle with shame, which can lead to disconnection, isolation, and withdrawal from friends and family. Unfortunately, withdrawing can lead people to feel more shame, which creates a cycle that leaves the survivor without healthy connections to others. Older children who have experienced trauma may engage in using substances or behave in risky ways, which can put strain on their relationships. Nevertheless, trauma survivors can have long-term, meaningful relationships as they learn to manage the effects of their trauma.



SOCIAL

Trauma survivors often report feeling disconnected in social situations. Everyday situations can feel threatening and unsafe. A commonplace social encounter at the grocery store can be viewed by a trauma survivor as full of risk, danger, uncertainty, and ultimately unsafe to enter. Over time, the survivor might decide to avoid social interactions altogether because they cause stress or bring up feelings of helplessness.

Evelyn's Story

Notes:

Hey, I'm Evelyn, and I'm 26. I grew up in a good home, had what I thought was a normal childhood for the most part. I went off to college, finished my degree, and settled into what I thought was going to be a great relationship with a guy who I graduated with. Things were going fine until we moved in together and then everything changed.

Changing for Fear

Notes:

It started with him yelling at me one night and accusing me of cheating on him when I hadn't. I remember feeling incredibly scared; almost like I was paralyzed but still able to think and remember. I couldn't move, couldn't breathe even, and my heart felt like it was just pounding in my chest. Situations like that happened off and on with him over the course of about a year. Even when they weren't happening, I was still super afraid that they would; to the point that I changed who I was to try and keep him from getting angry again.

Drifting

Notes:

Slowly, I started to drift. I stopped talking to my parents and my sister, didn't return texts from friends even when they were asking me if I was okay, and on the occasion that I did talk to someone, I would cover up and just tell them that everything is great and that I was just busy. The first time I tried to leave was also the first time that he hit me.

Recognizing the Abuse

Notes:

I was reading online about relationship problems and came across some stuff about abuse. Over the next few days I thought more and more about what was happening to me, who I'd become because of him, and what I felt like I deserved in life. I got up the nerve to tell him I was leaving. He took my phone from me, my keys, my wallet and when I tried to fight back, that's when he did what he did. It was in that moment that I felt like I died inside and just didn't care what happened.

Escape and Recovery

Notes:

A month went by and my mom and dad showed up unexpectedly to take me to lunch. They basically didn't say no when I told them I was busy, that I couldn't get away from work, and that I wasn't feeling good either. After a few minutes sitting with them...my mom just knew...I don't know how, but she just knew. I remember when she put her arms around me and told me that it's going to be okay and that I'm safe that I just lost it. Honestly, I've been dealing with the effects of what he did to me ever since. Even after I got out, I still feel just stuck sometimes. I freeze up if I hear someone yell or even if they just raise their voice, it just all feels the same to me right now. Don't get me wrong, there are some things that have gotten much better, and I'm grateful for those. Everyone tells me that it gets better and that there's hope, and I believe that; I'm just working on getting through today.

Heartache

Notes:

Heartache purged layers of baggage I didn't know I carried. Gifts hide under the layers of grief.

People Affected Differently

Notes:

You are hiking along a path through a forest and as it gets dark; you get lost. It's cold and you are hungry, but fortunately, you came prepared with layers of clothing, food, your GPS, and a blanket. You are prepared to take on the night ahead. Imagine if you had been wearing shorts and had forgotten your backpack with all of your supplies. You may not have been prepared to



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take on the long, cold night in the same way. While the circumstance is the same, you are better equipped to handle it when you have some protective factors present. The same is true for survivors of trauma. Trauma doesn't affect everyone the same way. While some experience the negative effects for years, others seem to move through trauma at a faster pace and can even talk about their experiences as a source of personal growth. So, how can trauma leave one person devastated and the other person feeling stronger?

Resilience and Protective Factors

Notes:

Certain protective factors help lessen the harmful effects trauma can have on a person. These protective factors make people more resilient, meaning the person can work through the trauma with fewer long-term, negative effects on their life while developing meaning from the experience. Some protective factors include:

- Supportive and nurturing family environment
- Parents and caregivers who display appropriate and healthy affection
- Academic achievement
- Socioeconomic status, including monetary and financial stability
- Reaching out for help from others and attending support groups
- Learning coping strategies

It's Not the Person, It's the Past

Notes:

PTSD: It's not the person refusing to let go of the past, but the past refusing to let go of the person.

Facts About PTSD

Notes:

Even with protective factors in place, some people will still experience their trauma more severely and for a longer time than others. One of the most commonly discussed psychological effects of trauma is the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

Hover over each item to learn more about PTSD.



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Factors v. Symptoms

Notes:

Not everyone who is exposed to trauma develops PTSD, but many do. No one knows exactly what causes PTSD. Some factors that may influence the development of PTSD include:

- Feeling horror, helplessness, and extreme fear after a traumatic event
- Having little social support after the event
- Dealing with extra stress after the event
- Having a pre-existing mental health or substance use conditions, like depression or anxiety

Someone suffering from PTSD may exhibit a number of symptoms. Symptoms are how PTSD appears. Some symptoms that may tell us someone has PTSD include:

- Re-experiencing the traumatic event as if it were happening again in the present moment, called flashback. Vivid nightmares are also a re-experience of trauma.
- Avoidance - such as staying away from any place or event that remind the person of the trauma.
- Hyperarousal - such as having difficulty sleeping or being jumpy or startled very easily.
- Thinking and mood problems - such as memory difficulties or loss of interest in activities.

Sort the factors and symptoms related to PTSD by dragging the boxes below into the spaces on the sides.

Statements	Answers
Helplessness or extreme fear after an event	PTSD Factors
Extra stress after an event	PTSD Factors
Experiencing flashbacks	PTSD Symptoms
Difficulty sleeping	PTSD Symptoms
Lack of social support after an event	PTSD Factors
Pre-existing mental health condition	PTSD Factors
Avoiding places/events	PTSD Symptoms
Thinking or mood problems	PTSD Symptoms

Feedback:

Great! When a person develops PTSD, it's often because he or she is continuing to experience extreme stress and fear after the event, often coupled with a lack of support and other issues. The symptoms shown here all negatively affect a person's quality of life.

Signs and Symptoms

Notes:

Your relationship with a trauma survivor can be a significant source of healing in their life, and you can help them overcome possible barriers to getting the help they need. It can be challenging to know if someone you know or care about needs help due to their experience of trauma, so be on the lookout for some noticeable signs and symptoms. These include:

- Problems with sleep
- Anger
- Disconnection or withdrawal
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Flashbacks
- Chronic feelings of being unsafe
- Suicidal thoughts

Time and time again, survivors who have been through even the most horrific trauma learn to recover their lives and live vibrantly despite what has happened in the past. Survivors often accomplish this with the help of others. Reaching out can be a scary experience, but it is the most important part of the healing and recovery process. Many survivors talk about taking the first step toward recovery and the relief that came along with finally acknowledging what happened in their lives to another person. Reaching out for help can lead to many different roads to recovery.

Safe Connections are Fundamental

Notes:

Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.



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Recovery Options

Notes:

Recovery does not happen overnight but is a journey toward full potential and contribution to society. People who have experienced trauma or live with PTSD can and do recovery and experience full lives. Some treatment and recovery techniques include counseling, medication and group support.

COUNSELING

Talking to a counselor is often one of the routes that survivors take toward recovery. This can be done in an individual or group setting, depending on what the survivor is comfortable with and needs. Thankfully, there are many different methods of counseling that are specific to treating trauma and have shown great effectiveness. Counseling for trauma might include teaching about emotional regulation, safety, coping skills, behavior management, and managing trauma reminders.

MEDICATION

Sometimes medication can be helpful for a person who has experienced trauma. Some individuals seek help and healing from both a psychiatrist who can provide a medication and a counselor or therapist while they journey toward recovery.

GROUP SUPPORT

The experience of talking to, being around, and receiving support from others who have survived trauma can be healing and empowering to a person in trauma recovery. Peer support, and even group therapy for trauma survivors, can provide validation, letting the survivor know that they are not alone in the journey of recovery. Group support for trauma can also be a rich source of knowledge, allowing the survivors to learn coping skills from one another and serve as a way for the survivor to help others on similar journeys.

Meet Jacob

Notes:

Hi, my name is Jacob. I've been through some dark times in my life, especially over the past few years. I tried a lot of things to make me feel better, make me feel good about my life, but I kept on finding myself feeling empty, ashamed, and constantly on edge. Most of all, I felt incredibly angry, sometimes for no reason at all, and I would lash out at my family, friends, and basically



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anyone who cared about me, even my kids. I finally pushed hard enough and wound up being alone for a long time, which only made me feel worse.

Finding Help

Notes:

Eventually I got sick of where I was and I tried to get some help, which is one of the best decisions I've made in my life so far. I sat down with a counselor and started talking about some stuff that happened to me when I was a kid, some awful things. I was sexually abused by a family member for about 2 years, starting when I was 3, from what I can piece together. I never talked about it until recently when I found a counselor. He helped me see how much the abuse affected me and how it impacted my life.

Having Hope

Notes:

I found out about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and came to accept that I had it. But counseling also taught me that I have the power to do something about it. I've been able to connect with other people too, some great people who have been through what I've been through and know what it's like to feel so ashamed of something that wasn't my fault. They taught me that I'm a survivor, and today I believe it. It doesn't mean that I feel good all the time; I still have some hard days, but for the first time in a long time, I know who I really am and I have hope.

Reaching Out

Notes:

Although a traumatic experience can have a grand effect on someone's life, trauma is not the defining factor of who a person is. With help and support, people can learn to live in light of their trauma, manage symptoms, and cope with the reality of their experience. If you are having trouble managing a past traumatic experience, then it is important you reach out to someone who you feel can be supportive and nonjudgmental. If you are unable to identify someone like this in your life, click the resources link at the top right to find resources available for you to use.



Knowledge Check Directions

Notes:

Knowledge Check. It's time to practice what you've learned! This is a five-question quiz.

Knowledge Check Question 1

Notes:

List three types of trauma a person might experience.

Feedback:

Good Thinking! While a person can experience many different types of trauma, some common types may be:

- Abuse
- Discrimination
- Exploitation/Human Trafficking
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Secondary Trauma
- Terror and Violence
- War

Knowledge Check Question 2

Notes:

Identify protective factors that lead to resilience. Select all that apply

Correct	Choice
Yes	A supportive and nurturing family
Yes	Financial stability
Yes	Seeking help from others

Yes	Learning coping strategies
No	Seeing a counselor

Feedback when correct:

Good Thinking! Resilience and Protective Factors can be:

- A supportive and nurturing family
- Financial stability
- Seeking help from others
- Learning coping strategies

Feedback when incorrect:

Let's Review. Resilience and Protective Factors can be:

- A supportive and nurturing family
- Financial stability
- Seeking help from others
- Learning coping strategies

Knowledge Check Question 3

Notes:

What are two major areas of a person's life that may be affected by trauma?

Feedback:

Good Thinking! The effects of trauma can impact a person's life physically, psychologically, emotionally, professionally and socially. It can also place a severe strain on relationships.

Knowledge Check Question 4

Notes:

Trauma usually affects people in the same way, and there's not much difference between the way most people deal with it.

Correct	Choice
No	True
Yes	False

Feedback when correct:

That's Right! Trauma doesn't affect everyone the same way. While some experience the negative effects for years, others seem to move through trauma at a faster pace and can even talk about their experiences as a source of personal growth

Feedback when incorrect:

Think Again. Trauma doesn't affect everyone the same way. While some experience the negative effects for years, others seem to move through trauma at a faster pace and can even talk about their experiences as a source of personal growth

Knowledge Check Question 5

Notes:

What are some signs and symptoms that a person might show when struggling to deal with trauma? Select all that apply.

Correct	Choice
Yes	Not sleeping well
Yes	Depression
Yes	Suicidal thoughts
Yes	Easily startled
Yes	Disconnected from others

Feedback when correct:

You've Got It! Symptoms that may indicate trauma include:

- Problems with sleep



- Anger
- Disconnection or withdrawal
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Flashbacks
- Chronic feelings of being unsafe
- Suicidal thoughts (Sweeton, 2013)

Feedback when incorrect:

Consider This. Symptoms that may indicate trauma include:

- Problems with sleep
- Anger
- Disconnection or withdrawal
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Flashbacks
- Chronic feelings of being unsafe
- Suicidal thoughts (Sweeton, 2013)