

## Trauma - Counselling Newsletter

Published: 5 October 2017



What is trauma? Trauma is usually a deeply disturbing experience where a person feels threatened with serious injury, violence or death. It can arise from many events, including an accident, workplace injury, robbery or harassment. Trauma can also occur from witnessing someone else being threatened or suffering an injury, or from hearing that a traumatic event has happened to a family member or friend.

**What are common responses to trauma?** Reaction to a traumatic event varies from person to person, but it's common to feel; fearful, shocked, numb, sad, guilty, angry, ashamed, stressed, anxious or helpless. Over time, most people are able to work through these feelings. Although they might feel distressed when they think about what happened, eventually they are able to process their feelings and continue with their everyday life. Others, however, find coping with trauma too much for them, and the stress and anxiety they feel impacts their wellbeing.

**How do I know if I need professional help?** Over time, most people recover from a traumatic event and find that the distressing thoughts and feelings occur less frequently. However, if your distress is extreme or continues over a period of time, you might be suffering from acute stress disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder. In these cases, you should seek professional help.

**Acute stress disorder** occurs when a person has an 'extreme' reaction after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, or hearing that a traumatic event has happened to a family member or friend. Everyone responds to trauma differently, and it's common to feel a range of different emotions. However, acute stress disorder in response to an event impacts a person's ability to return to everyday life. A person is diagnosed with acute stress disorder when their response to a trauma is immediate – that is, it occurs between three days and a month after the event.

Symptoms of acute stress disorder (and PTSD) include:

- **'Flashbacks'**, such as vivid memories, dreams, or feeling like you're re-experiencing the event
- **Low mood**, where it's difficult to experience any positive emotions
- **Changes in thoughts and beliefs** about the world, yourself or others (e.g. 'The world is unsafe', 'I'm no good')
- **Dissociation**, or difficulty in remembering parts of the event, or feeling 'detached' from reality
- **Avoiding thoughts and feelings** about the event and trying to stay away from things that remind you of it, including places and people
- **Feeling 'on edge'** and finding it difficult to relax, sleep or concentrate

**What is PTSD?** A person is diagnosed with PTSD when their extreme reaction to trauma lasts for over a month, or is delayed (symptoms don't come on until months after the trauma). PTSD may also occur in people who experience trauma over a long period of time (e.g. war veterans, police officers, paramedics).

**What can I do to cope after experiencing trauma?** If you've been through a traumatic event, it's important that you look after yourself. Shutting down your feelings and trying not to think about the event can actually make things worse. Self-care will usually involve a healthy routine and working through your feelings by the following strategies;

- talking to someone you trust about the event and how you're feeling
- writing down your feelings in a journal as a way of expressing what you're going through
- talking to a mental health professional, who can offer you strategies and skills to help you process the traumatic experience
- having a daily routine is usually helpful. You might feel tempted to stay in bed and not face the world, but in the long run, you'll just prolong your pain and stress. Keep up with activities you enjoy, try to include some exercise, a healthy diet, a good sleep routine and time out with friends

**Extract from Reach Out:**<https://au.reachout.com/articles/experiencing-trauma>