

Trauma

Your University at your side

Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton:

- provide free and confidential individual counselling
- offer non-judgemental support and understanding
- are professionally trained
- are experienced in dealing with a wide range of problems

Counselling can:

- help you to develop your strengths
- offer you the chance to focus on and understand your difficulties
- enable you to make positive decisions and changes
- help you to develop the skills and resources to cope
- help prevent small problems from becoming bigger

Get in touch

You can make an appointment to see a counsellor by filling out the Contact Us form at www.wlv.ac.uk/SSW, alternatively, you can come along to one of our drop-in services. For more information go to the web address above and click on the Mental Health and Wellbeing option. From here you will find a wealth of useful information and self-help tools as well as our Drop-ins and Group activities.

Trauma

How might I feel after a traumatic event?



What is trauma?

Trauma is a process in the mind and body. It occurs in response to experiencing or witnessing an event that is life threatening or has serious consequences, eg. disasters, major accidents, violent and sexual assault or illness.

The nature of the incident and how it is experienced, overwhelms a person's usual ability to deal with what has happened.

How the individual experiences it determines whether an event is traumatic or not, eg. events of a less dramatic nature can also be traumatising; one experience of abuse can be as traumatic as multiple experiences.

What is traumatic for a child is different from what is traumatic for an adult, eg. a baby or child who has not had their basic needs for warmth, care and nurturance met may have experienced this as life threatening and have the characteristics of trauma.

Feelings of previous trauma and loss can be evoked by a new traumatic event.

Traumatic stress

Traumatic stress is the stress associated with a traumatic incident; it is simply the body mobilising resources to deal with what is confronting it.

Biological responses to stress are both instant and instinctive. The brain releases hormones that mobilise the body's 'flight or fight' responses which are geared to survival. In situations where neither flight nor fight is an option, eg. in the case of a child being sexually abused, the body may activate the 'freeze' response whereby the person becomes immobilised by the overwhelming nature of the event.

Post-traumatic stress

Post-traumatic stress is the stress which carries on after a traumatic incident. Most people will experience some symptoms following a traumatic event, which will usually diminish over time as a person gradually comes to terms with what has happened. The time taken will vary from person to person.

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Sometimes the symptoms of post traumatic stress, although normal in themselves, persist to the extent that they cause significant problems in daily living. Post-traumatic stress disorder can be successfully treated by various psychological therapies.

Common reactions

Immediately after a trauma people will often experience shock and denial - feeling stunned, dazed or numb and unable to accept what has happened. These feelings gradually fade, over hours or days, and are replaced by other thoughts and feelings.

A person may have frequent thoughts or images of the event and might have nightmares.

A wide range of feelings may be experienced: anger (due to not feeling in control); fear; helplessness; grief and sadness (in response to various losses eg. people, safety and security health, material things); guilt (for surviving when others didn't); shame or embarrassment; relief; and hope.

There might be physical reactions such as: changes to a person's sleeping patterns, concentration levels, appetite or sex-drive; tiredness; general anxiety - being easily startled by noises, heart beating faster and breathing difficulties; general agitation; muscle tension; aches and pains and headaches.

What can I do to help myself?

You may need to grieve for who, or what, has been lost. This is a process that takes time and can be helped by rituals, such as funerals or memorial services.

Re-establish familiar every day activities and routines. Spend time with close friends and family and do some 'normal' things with people.

Ask for, and accept, the support of others.

Take care of yourself. People are more prone to accidents after experiencing a traumatic event.

Treat yourself extra kindly; you may need some time by yourself for example. Allow yourself time to sleep and rest; eat healthily; and take some regular exercise, such as walking, jogging or swimming, which is good for reducing the physical effects of post traumatic stress.

Finding a way to express feelings and thoughts - by talking, writing or through art - can help to make them more manageable.

Some people are helped by spending time in a support group, with other survivors, who have been through similar experiences.

Resist the temptation to misuse alcohol or drugs. Although this may provide some immediate relief of symptoms, it can create further problems for you to deal with.

You might like to read:

Herbert, C. (2002) *Understanding Your Reactions to Trauma*. Witney: Blue Stallion Publications.

Herbert, C. and Wetmore, A. (2008) *Overcoming Traumatic Stress: A Self-help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques*. London: Constable and Robinson Ltd.

People you might want to contact:

- Your doctor
- NHS 111 – tel: 111
- The Samaritans – tel: 08457 90 90 90
- Victim Support – tel: 0300 303 1977 or visit: www.victimsupport.org.uk
- Rape Crisis England and Wales – visit: www.rapecrisis.org.uk
- Women's Aid: 24 hour Domestic Violence Helpline – tel: 0808 2000 247 or visit: www.womensaid.org.uk
- Refuge provides aid and refuge to women and children – tel: 0808 2000 247 or visit: www.refuge.org.uk
- Survivors UK provides help for men who have been sexually abused or raped – visit: www.survivorsuk.org or tel the UK National Helpline: 0845 122 1201

Other useful websites:

The Royal College of Psychiatrists
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/atozindex.aspx

Advice from Mind:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/mental-health-a-z/

Useful leaflets:

www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp/

Health A-Z at:

www.nhs.uk

Free meditation exercises:

<http://franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness/>

