

Understanding the impacts of trauma

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is what happens to people when they experience events or social conditions that are outside of their control and that overwhelm their ability to cope and feel safe. It can cause lasting emotional, physical, psychological, and/or spiritual harm. It often leaves people with experiences of shame, isolation and fear. It can negatively affect people's self-worth, which is how we see ourselves and our value in this world and in our relationships.

EXAMPLES OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS:

- Homophobia
- Biphobia
- Transphobia
- Racism
- Sexism
- Physical violence
- Emotional abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Sexual violence, sexual abuse, sexual assault and/or rape
- Serious accident or injury
- War
- Displacement
- Grief or loss

WHAT DOES TRAUMA LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?

PHYSICAL

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Nightmares or distressing dreams
- Jitteriness and/or easily startled
- Difficulty concentrating
- Intense alertness

MENTAL/COGNITIVE

- Gaps in memory, especially pertaining to the trauma
- Feeling disconnected from one's own feelings, body and/or the environment
- Flashbacks and/or unwanted, unexpected memories of past trauma

EMOTIONAL

- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Shame
- Self-blame
- Isolation
- Shock
- Intense fear, anger and/or sadness
- Emotional numbness

SPIRITUAL

- Questioning one's own purpose
- Questioning who you are and whether you matter
- Questioning the presence of a greater power (i.e., God, Allah, divinities, etc.)

RELATIONAL

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|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty trusting others | <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of abandonment and/or rejection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty maintaining relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding people, places or things that remind you of past trauma |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty with physical and/or sexual intimacy | |

TRIGGERS

A trigger is a person, place, thing or situation that may cause or contribute to an unwanted and often uncontrollable response (e.g. crying, panic attacks, feeling angry or upset, shaking, vomiting, etc.).

Triggers activate a stress response within the body and brain, which include:

- **Fight:** clenching your jaw, hands or arms; feeling like you need to defend yourself; arguing with others
- **Flight:** leaving the situation; running away; moving your body away from a person/group; avoiding certain situations, topics and/or people; avoiding eye contact
- **Freeze:** being silent; holding your breath; feeling like you can't move

Triggers can include: people that may resemble someone who harmed you; an object, place or a time of day /week/ month/ year related to a traumatic experience; sounds, smells and/or tastes that remind you of a traumatic experience; or a situation where another is being harmed.

What have you noticed are some of your triggers?
