

# UNDERSTANDING & TALKING ABOUT TRAUMA

We know trauma comes in all shapes and sizes, and that it's often at the root of many challenges to our mental fitness. It is difficult to tell who experiences its profound ongoing impacts. TOOLS TO:TALK have spoken to members of its community to develop this handy guide to understanding and talking about trauma, using their first hand experience of trauma response.

The term 'trauma' describes a one off or ongoing significant threat to safety. Examples include actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.



Both direct, personal exposure and witnessing trauma to others can lead to a trauma response. "If you have experienced trauma you can instinctively switch into survival mode."

The mind is subconsciously on high alert. We are more likely to instinctively perceive situations as threatening. Hyper-arousal leads to increased anxiety and a tendency to be easily startled.



Many experience dissociation from reality. "I have flashbacks - where I relive it - it's overwhelming. This is tiring, and can result in low mood, lack of motivation & low self esteem."

Levels of stress hormones are high. The body is set to fight or flight mode, tense and prepared to respond to threat. People can experience sleep problems, nightmares, difficulty concentrating & hypersensitivity to pain.



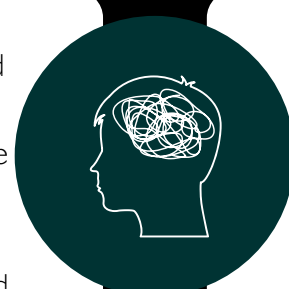
It can be useful to identify where different emotions are felt physically. For example anxiety. "If I'm feeling anxiety in my chest, I do some deep breathing. If in my hands, I like sitting on them to ground myself."

Cognitive appraisal is exaggerated, meaning we are more likely to evaluate a situation as threatening. This is a primitive response designed to prepare and protect us in case of further danger.



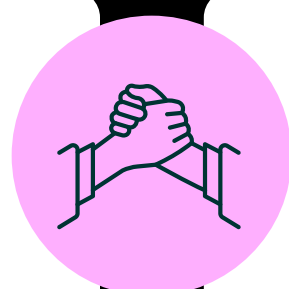
"A reaction to trauma is a natural response, it shouldn't automatically be considered a 'mental illness'. Taking it back to prehistoric times- if you saw a tiger you needed to 'flight or flight'. It's the same thing"

Trauma poses a huge challenge to mental fitness, both in the short and long term. It is incredibly important that we validate experiences and the impacts they have. This being said, trauma experience can still maintain good mental fitness when supported.



Many mental health diagnoses have life events underpinning them. Therefore, it can be helpful to ask 'what's happened' rather than 'what's wrong' if someone seems to be acting differently.

TOOLS TO:TALK About Trauma aims to acknowledge experience, validate reaction and hopes to move our community into a space where we educate all to improve accessibility.



"I think the most important thing, as always, is awareness. Please just know that someone in the room may have experienced something beyond your imagination and that may explain why they have responded that way"

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