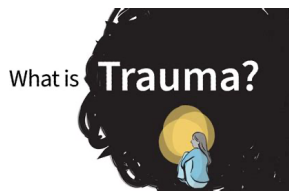




HELPING HANDS



Trauma: Understanding Signs, Symptoms, and What to Know



Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to an event or series of events that are deeply distressing or disturbing. This can include experiences like abuse, assault, accidents, natural disasters, or ongoing neglect. Trauma isn't defined by the event itself, but by how it impacts the person who experiences it — and that impact can vary widely.

Common signs and symptoms of trauma can be physical, emotional, and behavioral. Emotional symptoms may include anxiety, depression, mood swings, or emotional numbness. People may experience flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts related to the traumatic event.

Behavioral signs might include social withdrawal, substance use, or difficulties with trust and relationships. Physically, trauma can manifest as fatigue, insomnia, or somatic symptoms like headaches or gastrointestinal issues (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

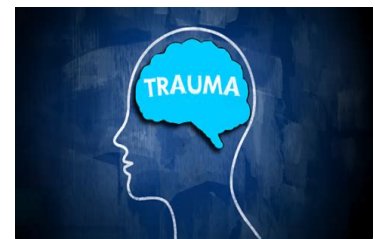
Trauma can also lead to long-term mental health challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially if left unaddressed. Importantly, trauma is treatable. Therapeutic approaches like trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing), and peer support can help individuals process and heal from trauma.

Understanding trauma is the first step toward reducing stigma and encouraging people to seek help. If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of trauma, reaching out to a mental health professional can make a difference. Help is a sign of strength. Mental health is a shared human experience. It's in the way we help ourselves and show up for each other.

The Lived Experience of Trauma

The experience of trauma is deeply personal and often complex. While trauma is commonly defined as a response to an overwhelming event or series of events, its effects go far beyond the moment of the incident. It disrupts a person's sense of safety, trust, and control — both internally and in relation to the world around them.

For many, trauma doesn't feel like one isolated memory, but rather like a lingering presence. It can show up in the body as tension, hypervigilance, or exhaustion. Emotionally, it may feel like fear, shame, numbness, or anger. These responses are not signs of weakness — they are natural survival mechanisms the brain uses to protect itself from danger (van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma can fragment time and memory. Survivors often describe feeling “stuck” in the past or reliving experiences through flashbacks, nightmares, or panic attacks. Everyday situations — a sound, a smell, a tone of voice — can trigger reactions that seem disproportionate but are grounded in real physiological responses to perceived danger (Porges, 2011).



Because trauma impacts how people relate to themselves, others, and their environment, healing requires more than just talk. It often involves reconnecting with the body, rebuilding trust, and creating a sense of safety over time. Trauma is isolating. Recovery is possible and it begins with being seen, heard, and believed. Mental Health Awareness is about fostering compassion, deepening understanding, and encouraging action. It's a reminder that mental health is all our responsibility. Taking care of our minds is just as important as taking care of our bodies. It's necessary. It's brave. When we make mental health a priority, we create a world where everyone has the chance to thrive.

Healing Trauma: Paths to Recovery



Treating trauma requires a holistic and compassionate approach that addresses the mind, body, and nervous system. Trauma can deeply impact how a person thinks, feels, and relates to the world, but with the right support, healing is possible.

One of the most effective evidence-based treatments is **trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT)**. This approach helps individuals process traumatic memories, challenge unhelpful beliefs, and develop healthy coping strategies (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017). It's especially effective for children and adolescents but can benefit adults as well.

Another powerful modality is **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)**. This therapy uses guided eye movements to help the brain reprocess traumatic memories so they are less distressing (Shapiro, 2018). EMDR is widely used for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and has shown strong results across various populations.

Somatic therapies — such as Somatic Experiencing or trauma-sensitive yoga — focus on the body's role in storing trauma. These approaches help individuals tune into physical sensations and release tension, restoring a sense of safety in the body (Levine, 2010).

Support groups, peer support, and culturally grounded healing practices also play a vital role in trauma recovery. Building trust, safety, and connection are often just as important as clinical intervention.

There's no one-size-fits-all path to healing, but trauma treatment works — and recovery is real.



IAM Peer Employee Assistance Program

The heart and soul of the District 141 Employee Assistance Program is the local lodge EAP peer coordinator. These dedicated men and women volunteer their personal time to assist other union members and their families who are experiencing personal difficulties. EAP peer coordinators do not make clinical diagnoses or clinical evaluations; they are trained to make a basic assessment of your situation and refer you to an appropriate resource for a more detailed evaluation. EAP peer coordinators will follow up to ensure you have been able to access services that addressed the difficulty you were experiencing.

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Books About Trauma

***The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.**

— A foundational book explaining how trauma affects the brain and body, and how healing is possible.

***Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* by Peter A. Levine, Ph.D.**

— Introduces Somatic Experiencing and the role of the nervous system in trauma recovery.

***In an Unspoken Voice* by Peter A. Levine**

— A deeper look at how the body responds to trauma and pathways to healing.

***The Polyvagal Theory* by Stephen W. Porges, Ph.D.**

— A neuroscience-focused text exploring how the vagus nerve shapes emotional and physiological responses to trauma.

***Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman, M.D.**

— A classic that explores trauma in both personal and political contexts (e.g., domestic abuse, war, and sexual violence).