

Trauma - Grab Sheet 1 of 3

Introduction

This is the first of three simple grab sheets for anyone who would like to know more about Trauma:

Grab sheet 1 tells us what trauma is and what causes it.

Grab sheet 2 tells us what someone with trauma might feel - emotionally, physically or in their relationships, and how they might behave.

Grab sheet 3 tells us what approaches can be used to support people who have experienced trauma.

What is trauma?

Trauma refers to very distressing, frightening or disturbing experiences, and the ways in which an individual responds to such an event. When a person experiences one or more traumatic events, they may go on to experience difficulties in their thoughts, feelings, physiology, behaviour and relationships.

What causes trauma?

It could be one traumatic event like:

- Being hit or beaten up
- A car accident
- A serious injury or illness (e.g. CV19)
- Being raped
- Hate Crime or Mate Crime
- Someone a person knows dying or dying suddenly
- A flood or earthquake - sometimes called a natural disaster
- A terrorist attack, being tortured, a fire or being in a war.

It could be more than one traumatic event like:

- Lots of traumatic events happening over someone's life
- Regularly being physically, sexually or emotionally hurt by others
- Repeatedly not having needs met when young
- Being repeatedly abused when young and/or when older
- Being bullied/ taken advantage of over life span



- Perhaps being a soldier, prisoner, asylum seeker or a refugee, and experiencing traumatic things over many years
- Being a slave and repeatedly not being given rights
- Caring for many people with serious illnesses (e.g. CV19) over many months/over career span

How trauma is often talked about

- Sometimes the term 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)' is used for certain types of trauma. This language is often used when people have experienced one traumatic incident.
- You may also hear the terms 'Complex PTSD (C-PTSD)' or 'Developmental Trauma'. This is often when people have experienced repeated and sustained traumatic and frightening events throughout their life.

The trauma response

During frightening events, parts of the human brain go **offline**, so that the person can quickly enter into **survival mode or autopilot**. In autopilot, the complex processing bits of the brain 'shut down' so the person can focus on surviving the threat with strategies such as 'fight, flight or freeze'.



Our brains are very clever to keep us safe with autopilot like this. But **in survival mode, emotions and memories are not processed or stored away properly**. Strong emotions and memories can remain very much alive, fragmented and confused in the brain. **This can leave people in a constant state of threat/anxiety/fear (and in fight, flight or freeze)**. They might feel like the threat is present and real NOW, even when the threat is long past.

To find out more about Trauma and PTSD an excellent website for more information and resources is: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>