

Trauma and Abuse

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What is trauma?

Trauma is defined as emotional and physical responses to a terrible event. Shortly after the event, the individual is likely to experience shock, denial, numbness, disorientation, helplessness, feelings of being overwhelmed and more. Delayed reactions may include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, depression, anger, guilt and even physical symptoms like headaches, nausea, and sleep disturbance. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives and continue to experience longer-term effects of traumas. Psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions and help them work through trauma.

PTSD Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is the condition that can follow trauma in which symptoms of trauma become persistent and interfere with an individual's behaviours, emotions, relationships, physical health and even their faith and belief systems.

Complex Trauma can occur when there is a history of multiple traumatic events and/or when trauma occurs in the vital stages of childhood development.

What is abuse?

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Physical abuse

- Physical abuse; such as hitting with hands or objects, kicking, slapping, burning tying or otherwise restraining etc.
- Sexual abuse; forcing someone into a sexual act against their will.

- Constraints and restrictive practices: purposely holding someone against their will, isolating them from interactions with other people. (except in situations when it is necessary for medical treatment)
- Physical neglect; failure to provide basic human needs such as food, shelter, clothing and protection. Or denying an individual medical or dental care that places the individual at undue risk through unsafe environments or practices.

Emotional abuse

- Emotional abuse; bullying or harassing, verbal abuse, making threats or intimidating the individual.
- Emotional neglect; withholding normal human attachment, imposing social isolation, restricting intellectual or emotional growth.
- Passive neglect; failure to provide a dependant individual with the basic necessities of life.
- Wilful deprivation; to deliberately deny the individual of help or assistance exposing the individual to harm: physically or emotionally.

Other forms of abuse

- Financial abuse; withholding access to financial means or an individual's assets, or using an individual's assets in a wrongful way against their will.
- Legal or civil abuse; abusing an individual's legal or civil rights.
- Systemic abuse; withholding or failure to provide adequate or appropriate services, including services that are appropriate to that person's age, gender, culture, needs or preferences.

Treatment

There are various different types of treatment for trauma and abuse. It is important that you tell your treating doctor or health professional if you have experienced trauma. You can disclose that you have traumatic events in your past without having to disclose details of what they were. When you and your health professional feel it is safe for you to talk about your experiences you can decide then how you both want to proceed with treatment.

Symptoms of emotional and psychological trauma

Following a traumatic event, or repeated trauma, people react in different ways, experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to think, feel, or respond to trauma, so don't judge your own reactions or those of other people. Your responses are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events.

Emotional and psychological symptoms of trauma:

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others

- Feeling disconnected or numb

Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

Helpful links

For regional services near you, please use the [Directory](#) or the [Service Finder Navigational Tool](#) on this website.

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention 1800 105 303

Anglicare 1800 809 722 www.anglicare.vic.org.au

Australian Red Cross www.redcross.org.au

Centre Against Sexual Assault (South Eastern) (03) 9594 2289 1800 806 292 www.casa.org.au

Child Protection Line 13 12 78

Department of Human Service DHS www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Domestic Abuse Australia www.whiteribbon.org.au

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault www.wdvce.org.au

Domestic Violence Resource Centre www.dvrce.org.au

Domestic Violence Victoria www.dvvic.org.au

HelpGuide www.HelpGuide.org

Hidden Hurt www.hiddenhurt.co.uk/help_for_abusers.html

No to violence (03) 9487 4500 www.ntv.org.au

Reach Out www.reachout.com

Road Trauma Support Service www.rtssv.org.au

The Blue Knot Foundation 1300 657 380 www.theblueknot.org.au

Uniting Care Connections www.connections.org.au

Victims of Crime www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au 1800 819 817

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