

# FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING: OVERCOMING TRAUMA AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

A WEBINAR FOR EMPLOYEES FROM YOUR  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

February 14, 2024

# INTRODUCTION

*“The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong in the broken places.”*



Ernest  
Hemingway

# OBJECTIVES

- Define trauma and review the various types, impacts, and reactions
- Discuss factors that increase susceptibility to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Review treatment options, resilience-building strategies, and indicators of post-traumatic growth (PTG)
- Participate in a guided visualization activity
- Reveal best practices for supporting a loved one

## SECTION 1

# TRAUMA: DEFINITION, IMPACT, AND REACTIONS

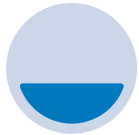
Trauma is not what happens to you, it's what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you.

## DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

**An emotional response to a terrible event, like an accident, rape, or natural disaster.**

Trauma can also result from an accumulation of smaller or less pronounced events such as bullying, divorce, or financial/legal troubles.

# ACUTE, CHRONIC, AND COMPLEX TRAUMA

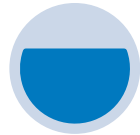


## Acute

A single traumatic incident with a beginning, middle, and end

**Examples:**

- Sexual assault or rape
- A car accident
- A natural disaster

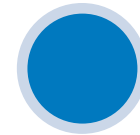


## Chronic

Prolonged and ongoing trauma (abuse) or multiple traumatic events that can persist for weeks, months, or years

**Examples:**

- Kidnapping/being held captive
- Ongoing physical abuse
- Suffering from a long-term, debilitating illness



## Complex

Multiple, often interrelated, traumatic experiences and the difficulties that arise through adapting to or surviving them

Trauma perpetrated by a caregiver or trusted person where there is a sense of betrayal

**Examples:**

- Childhood abuse
- Domestic violence

# COLLECTIVE AND VICARIOUS TRAUMA

## Collective

- Experienced as a group, society, or world



COVID-19 pandemic



War



Mass shootings



Famine



Detrimental effects of climate change

## Vicarious

- Indirect exposure of a traumatic event often transpiring while helping others work through their trauma



Providing front-line care to patients during the pandemic



Caring for individuals with a debilitating injury or chronic, progressive illness



Responding to emergencies or crime scenes

# HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THE BRAIN

Can struggle to function and lead to feelings of panic and anxiety

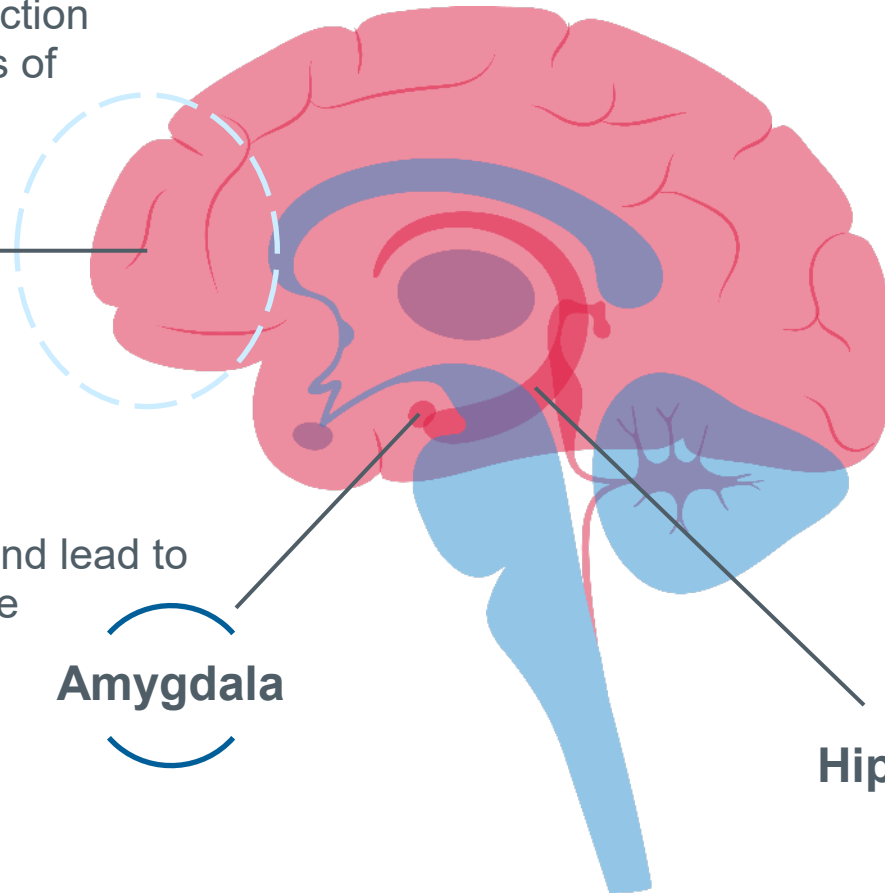
**Prefrontal Cortex**

Can become hyperactive and lead to hypervigilance

**Amygdala**

Can become smaller and lead to fragmented memory

**Hippocampus**





# SHORT-TERM REACTIONS



## Physical

- Stomach upset, trouble eating
- Insomnia and feeling very tired
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, feeling shaky
- Ongoing medical problems getting worse



## Emotional

- Feeling nervous, fearful, sad
- Being shocked, numb, or detached
- Guilt and/or shame
- Being withdrawn, feeling rejected, or abandoned

# LONG-TERM REACTIONS

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Intense or unpredictable feelings

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Denial

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Changes to thoughts and behavior patterns

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Sensitivity to environmental factors

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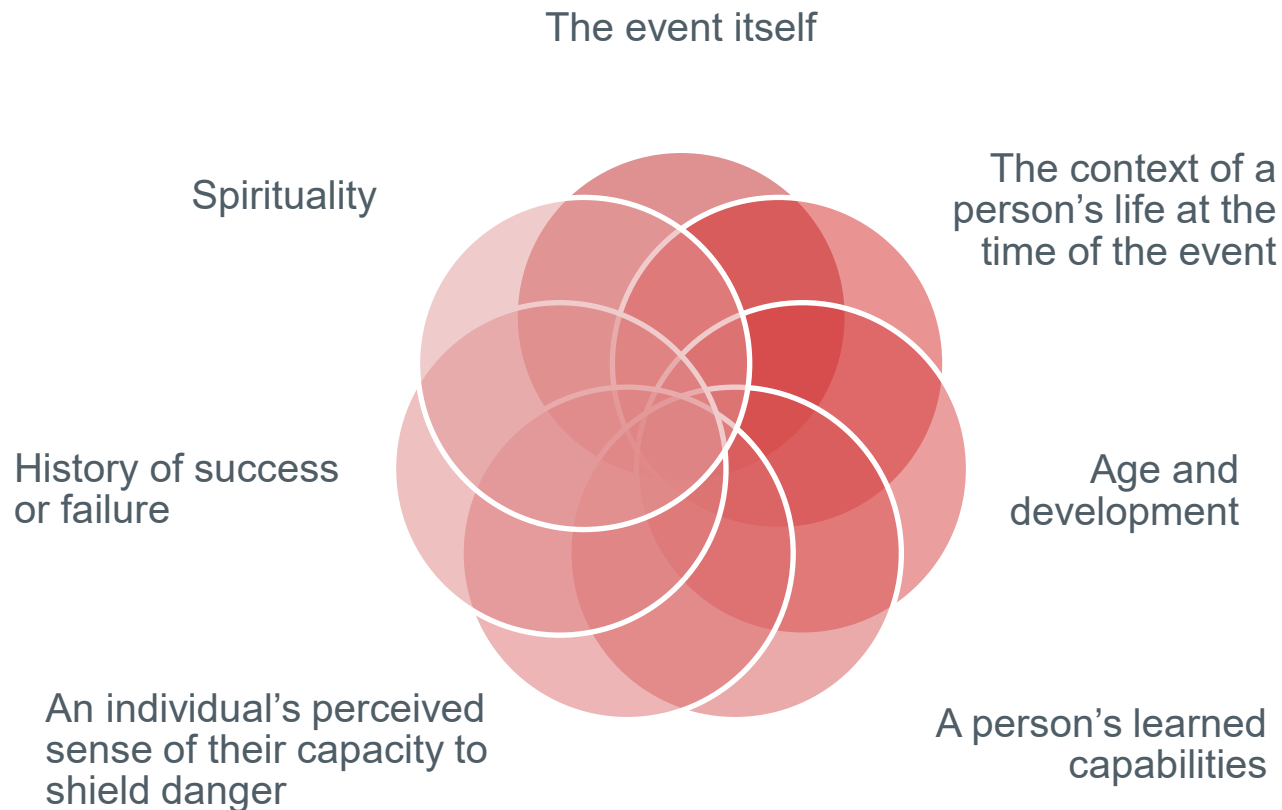
Strained interpersonal relationships

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SECTION 2

# SUSCEPTIBILITY TO TRAUMATIZATION AND PTSD

# SUSCEPTIBILITY TO TRAUMATIZATION



# POST- TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER



**PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that may result from experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, a series of events, or a set of circumstances.**

Experienced as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being.

- Intense intrusive thoughts
- Avoidant behaviors
- Memory recall disruption
  - Negative, distorted thoughts/emotions
- Arousal and reactive symptoms

# COMPLEX POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Includes core symptoms of PTSD:

 <p><b>Hyper-aware of any danger.</b></p>	 <p><b>Avoiding trauma triggers.</b></p>
 <p><b>Flashbacks.</b></p>	

Results from experiencing chronic trauma such as:

- Prolonged domestic violence
- Childhood sexual/physical abuse
- Torture, genocide, and slavery

Plus:

 <p><b>Difficulty regulating emotions.</b></p>	 <p><b>Feelings of shame or guilt.</b></p>
<p><b>Trouble staying in relationships.</b></p>	

## SECTION 3

# TREATMENTS, RESILIENCE, AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH


# TREATMENTS, RESILIENCE AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

*“Courage does not always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow.’”*

Mary Anne  
Radmacher



# EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENTS



Cognitive behavioral  
therapy




Cognitive processing  
therapy



Prolonged exposure



Eye movement  
desensitization and  
reprocessing therapy




Dialectical  
behavioral therapy




Medication

# ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUES AND INTERVENTIONS




Biofeedback-based techniques



Vagus nerve stimulation



Mindfulness-based therapies



Somatic experiencing



Trauma drama



Equine facilitated therapy for complex trauma

# GUIDED EXERCISE: SPECIAL SPACE





***What single word  
would you use to best  
describe how you feel?***

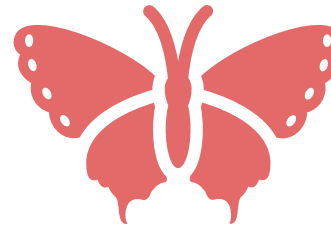
# INCREASING RESILIENCE



Build connections



Foster wellness



Find purpose



Embrace healthy thoughts

# POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH



# SIGNS OF POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH



Gaining awareness of the changes



Having a greater appreciation of life



Forming better relationships



Noticing signs of resilience



Increasing spirituality



Finding purpose and meaning

SECTION 4

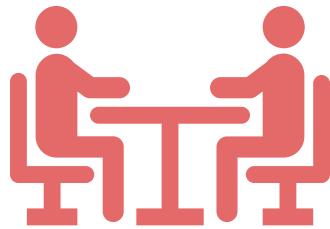
# SUPPORTING OTHERS



# SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE



Talking while respecting boundaries



Helping your loved one sit with their feelings



Connecting your loved one to additional resources



Engaging in self-care

# CHOOSING YOUR WORDS



## What not to say

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Everything happens for a reason

---

It wasn't that bad

---

Look on the bright side, it could have been worse

---

I know how you feel

---

You shouldn't be angry

---

If you stopped thinking about it so much, you'd be happier

---

You should be over it by now

---

Just move on



## What to say

---

I'm here for you

---

I'm here to listen

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That sounds very painful. How can I help you?

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Thank you for trusting me to share this

---

I believe you

---

I believe *in* you

---

You are loved

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



---

Ensure safety, meet needs

---

Allow them to be sad or cry

---

Let them talk, write, and/or draw pictures about the event

---

Try to stick to routines

---

Help them feel in control

---

Tune into sudden changes

---

Contact a healthcare provider if new problems develop



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Communicate an expectation that they need to be tough

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Make them discuss the event before they are ready

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Get angry if they show strong emotions

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Get upset if they regress in their development

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Make promises you can't keep

# SUMMARY



- All adverse events have the potential to be traumatizing
- Believe, validate, and provide support to those who have been traumatized
- Consider evidence-based and alternative treatments and seek help from trauma care professionals
- Engage in concrete activities to bolster resilience and post-traumatic growth

# RESOURCES

## Books

- ***The Body Keeps The Score***
  - Bessel van der Kolk, 2015
- ***The Myth of Normal***
  - Gabor and Daniel Maté, 2022
- ***The Posttraumatic Growth Workbook***
  - Richard Tedeschi and Bret Moore, 2016

## Online Article

- How to Help Someone with Trauma  
[psychcentral.com/health/how-to-help-someone-with-trauma](https://psychcentral.com/health/how-to-help-someone-with-trauma)

## Podcasts

- [The Healing Trauma Podcast](#)
- ReRooted with Francesca Maximé  
Episode 5: [Somatic Experiencing with Dr. Peter A. Levine](#)

## Video

- **Breathing Exercise for Vagus Nerve Stimulation**  
[youtube.com/watch?v=eoUs2CkR6NE](https://youtube.com/watch?v=eoUs2CkR6NE)

## Additional Support

- CPTSD Foundation  
[cptsdfoundation.org/safe-support-groups](https://cptsdfoundation.org/safe-support-groups)
- [PTSD Coach](#)  
App for veterans with symptoms of PTSD

# THANK YOU



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