



Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress

Each day, people balance stress in their life. Some stresses are positive, like getting ready to go on vacation, while others are negative, like being stuck in traffic. These stresses combined exist in a state of equilibrium, and are normal for everyone.

When Trauma Occurs

While people are normally in a state of equilibrium, sometimes trauma occurs, and throws them off balance. It can be difficult to recover from trauma and restore that sense of balance to their lives.

Trauma may be brought on by stress, **acute** or **chronic**.

Acute Stress – usually caused by a sudden, arbitrary, often random event.

Chronic Stress – occurs over and over again, each time pushing the individual beyond their state of equilibrium.

Trauma most often comes from acute, unexpected stressors such as accidents, violent crime, natural disasters and war.

Trauma can also be caused by stressors such as chronic abuse and harassment.

Trauma and Loss

Trauma can be accompanied by many different types of loss:

- Loss of control over one's life
- Loss of faith in one's God, or other people
- Loss of a sense of fairness or justice

- Loss of property, self or loved ones
- Loss of a sense of immortality and invulnerability
- Loss of future

Because of these losses, trauma response involves grief and bereavement. One can grieve over the loss of loved things as well as loved people.

Trauma and Regression

Trauma is often accompanied by regression – mentally and physically.

1. Individuals may do things that seem childish later. For example:
 - Singing nursery rhymes
 - Assuming a fetal position, or crawling
 - Calling a law enforcement officer "mommy" or "daddy" (or at least thinking of them in that way)
2. Individuals may feel childish. For example:
 - Feeling little
 - Wanting "mommy" or "daddy" to come take care of them
 - Feeling weak
 - Feeling like they did when they were a child and something went terribly wrong

Post Traumatic Stress

While not all victims/survivors suffer from long-term stress reactions, many victims continue to re-experience crisis reactions over long periods of time, sometimes known as **Post Traumatic Stress**. Such crisis reactions are normally in response to **trigger events**. Trigger

events vary, but may include:

- The criminal justice process
- Sensing (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting) something similar to an experience during the traumatic event
- Remembrance dates of the incident
- Holidays or significant life events
- News reports about a similar event

Long-term stress or crisis reactions may be made better or worse by the actions of others. The negative actions of others are called the **second assault**. Sources may include:

- The criminal or civil justice systems
- The media
- Family friends and acquaintances
- Health and mental health acquaintances
- Victim compensation systems
- Clergy

The intensity of long-term stress reactions usually decreases over time, as does the frequency of the re-experienced crisis. However, the effects of a catastrophic situation cannot be "cured", but they can be managed with assistance from counsellors, family and one's self. Some coping strategies are:

Self:

- Keep busy with exercise and relaxation techniques
- Talk to other people you trust, or write your feelings in a journal
- Don't turn to drugs or alcohol to escape
- Try to stick to your regular schedule
- Give yourself permission to feel bad
- Do things that make you feel good
- Don't make any big decisions for a while,

but make many small ones so that you still feel in control of your life

- Take care of your health – sleep, eat, exercise
- Let yourself experience thoughts, dreams and flashbacks without fighting them
- Book an appointment with a counsellor if you are having trouble coping with the stress you are under
- Remember, you aren't crazy! This response is normal, and so are you.

Family and Friends:

- Listen carefully to the person
- Spend time with them, and offer assistance if needed
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Help them to keep up on daily tasks/chores
- Give them some private time
- Expect that they may be angry, don't take it personally
- Tell them that you are sorry, not that it "could have been worse"

Helpful Numbers

Crisis Line (Cambridge) – (519) 744-1813
Kid's Help Line – 1-800- 668-6868
KW Distress Centre – (519) 745-1166
The Parent Help Line – 1-888-603-9100
Telecare – (519) 658-6805
Youthline – (519) 745-9909

Victim Services maintains a listing of counsellors in the Region and their specialties, please call for more information (24 hrs):

(519) 585-2363

The information contained in this fact sheet was obtained from the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA). www.trvnova.org.



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