
Understanding Trauma

An overview by Courtney Skaggs



What we'll cover

- Clarify what Trauma is and what it looks like
- Discuss Somatic Symptoms and Neuroscience associated with trauma
- Discuss therapies and other modalities to treat trauma

Why it is important to understand trauma?

Trauma is everywhere! Every person experiences it to a certain extent throughout their lifetime. Understanding how it can affect us will enable us to be better equipped to deal with it in the future.



What trauma is NOT

-bad experience

-stressful events

-difficult season of life

-loss

-unhealthy relationships

-crisis

-someone else's perception



Tip

Covid and #metoo changed much of the verbage society uses around trauma.

What is **trauma**?

DSM-V defines trauma as “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence.”



Tip

A clear indicator for an experience of trauma is the presence of Acute Stress Disorder or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

- exposure to threat
- presence of intrusive symptoms associated with traumatic event(s)
- persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with traumatic event(s)
- negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with traumatic event(s)
- marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with traumatic event(s)
- duration of disturbance (longer than 1 month)

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/essentials/dsm5_ptsd.asp

Acute Stress Disorder

- lasts up to a month

Neuroscience and Somatic Responses

Trauma Interrupts Health

The Nervous System Loses Balance

Out of Balance



Disconnection



Fight/Flight



Freeze



Social NS

can't inhibit or regulate
SNS (fight/flight)
PNS (freeze)

Sympathetic NS

hypervigilance
anxiety
nightmares
PTSD

Parasympathetic NS

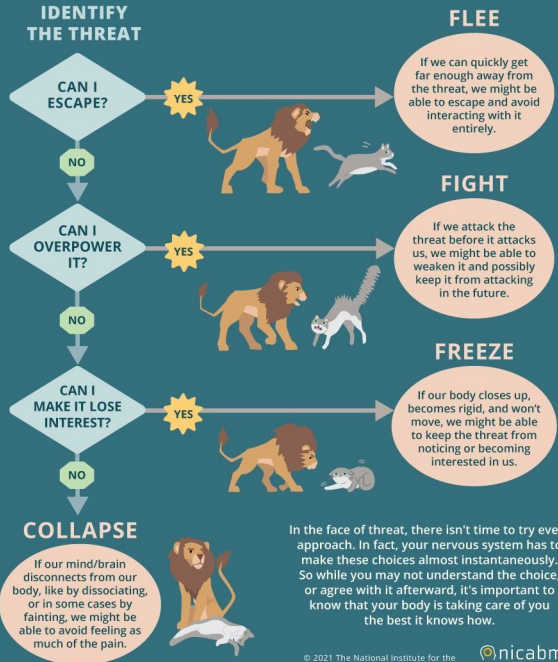
immobility
depression, apathy
fatigue



HOW THE NERVOUS SYSTEM RESPONDS TO TRAUMA

Adapted from Ruth Lanius, MD, PhD

How does your nervous system figure out how to respond in a crisis?
It's a split-second, unconscious process designed to choose the best option for keeping you safe.
Here's how it works:



In the face of threat, there isn't time to try every approach. In fact, your nervous system has to make these choices almost instantaneously. So while you may not understand the choice, or agree with it afterward, it's important to know that your body is taking care of you the best it knows how.

© 2021 The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine
nicabm
www.nicabm.com

Fight, Flight, Freeze

Fight- Can I overpower it?

Flight- Can I escape it?

Freeze- Can I trick it?

Tip

Asking someone why they didn't do something different can only serve to add more shame. The response was out of their conscious control.

*Instantaneous and non-conscious

*May become default responses

“When a traumatic incident is repeated, as with physical abuse, domestic violence, incest, or torture, mental, emotional, and behavioral strategies for coping can become habituated, closing off the possibility of exercising other options, even in less stressful circumstances. Those who were molested or beaten as children or teenagers might later be vulnerable to sexual abuse or violence, because their natural impulses to protect themselves and protest (physical and verbal) were extinguished.”

Babette Rothschild, *The Body Remembers*

Threat to Body

Thalamus

(Limbic System)

Amygdala

(fear center)

Hypothalamus

(emotional center)

Adrenal glands

**(epinephrine/adrenaline and
norepinephrine are secreted
for fight or flight)**

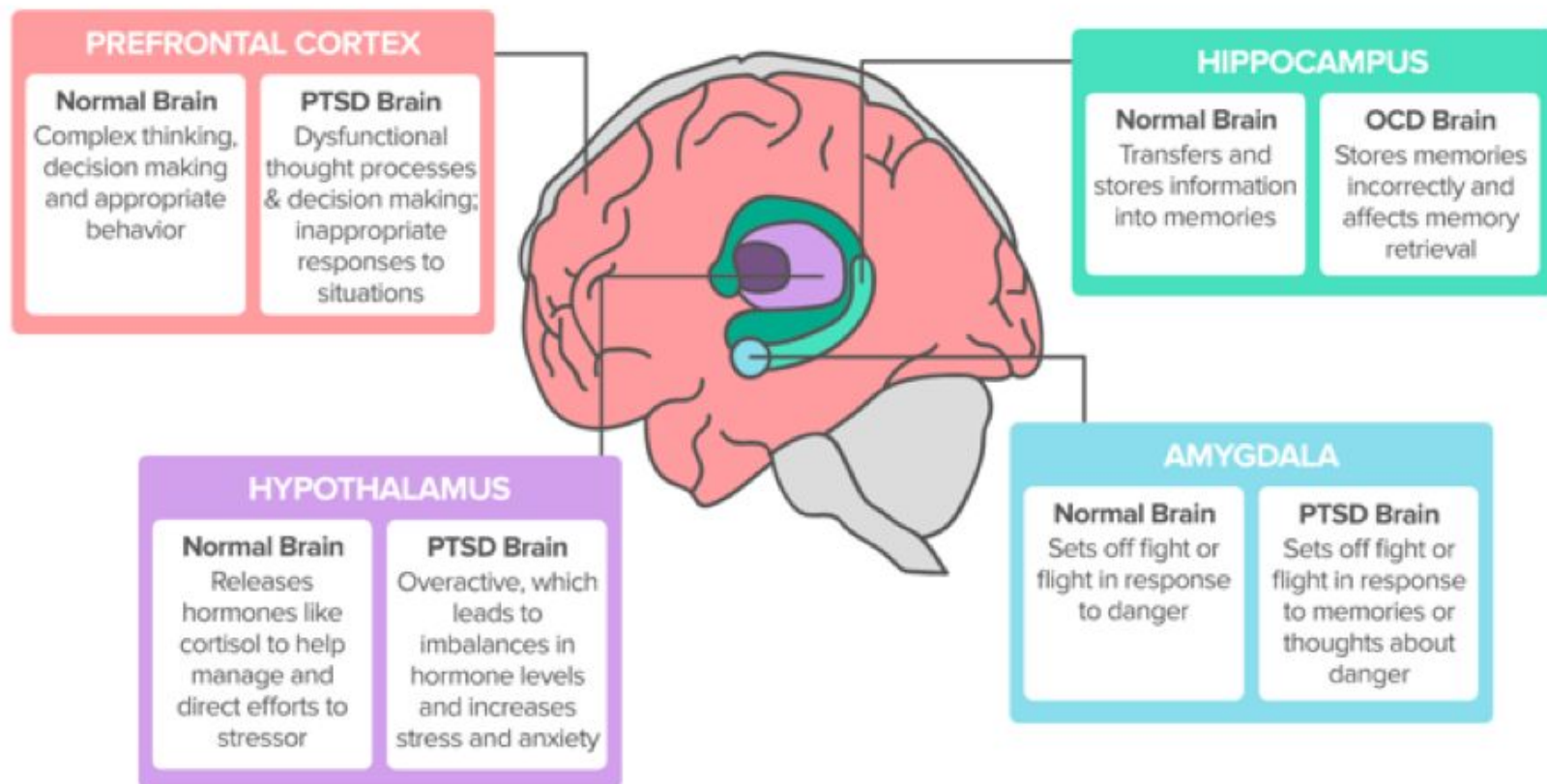
Sympathetic/Parasympathetic Nervous System

Body mobilized or immobilized

(Fight/Flight/Flee)

Cortisol is released to bring
body back to baseline after
threat dissipates in a
non-PTSD client

NORMAL INFORMATION PROCESSING AND PTSD MALFUNCTIONS IN THE BRAIN





Trauma gets stored in the body.

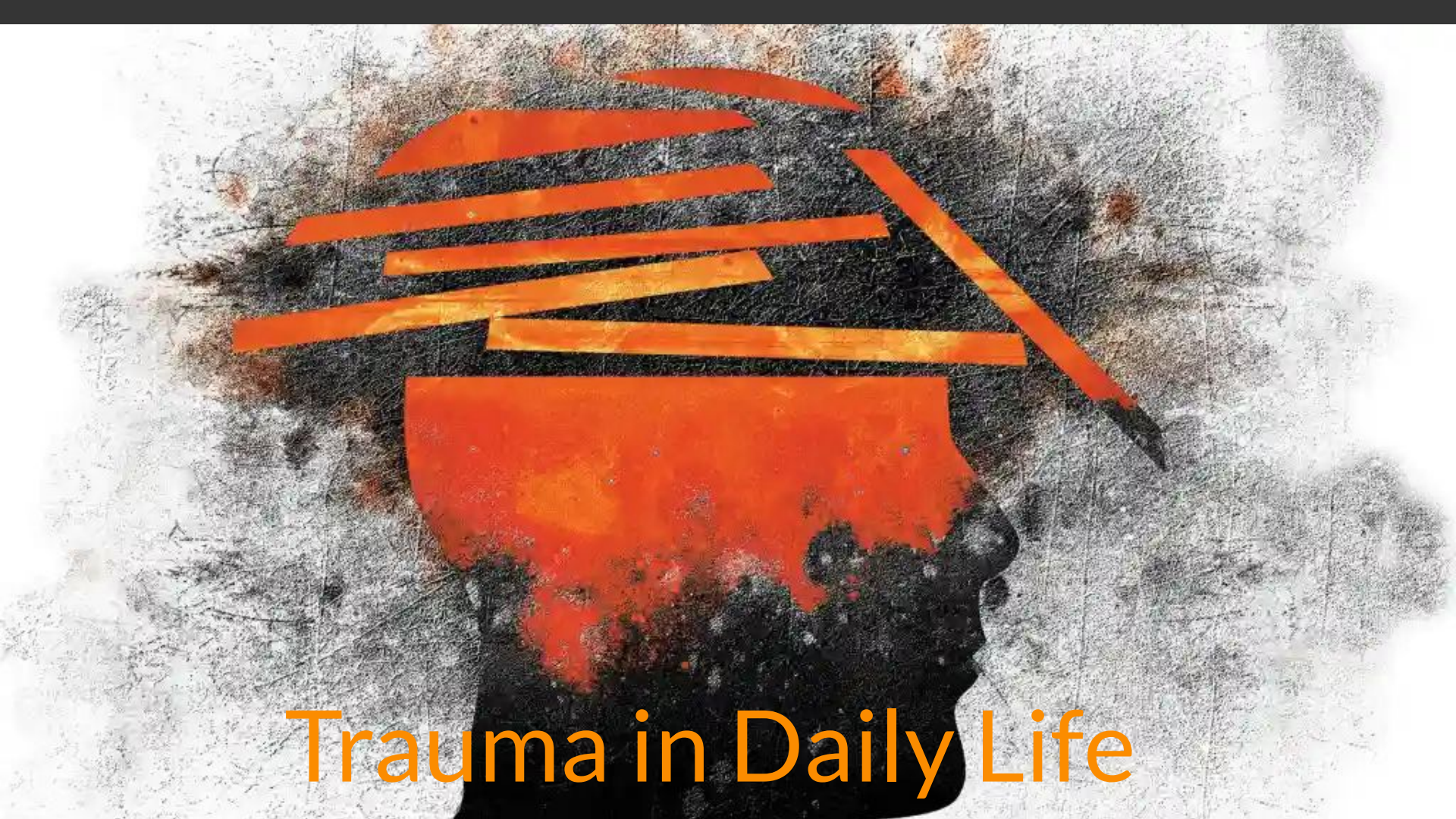
Once a person experiences a traumatic event and their body has a response to it, new neural-pathways form that will link the traumatic event with their somatic symptoms or bodily experiences.



Tip

Sensory stimuli can transport a person back to their traumatic experience instantaneously.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0x9_CRqshro



Trauma in Daily Life

Mental Overload:

An illustration of a person with long dark hair, wearing a yellow sweater, covering their face with their hands. The background is a light blue circle with swirling black lines and white plus signs, suggesting a state of mental distress or overload. Two faint, semi-transparent versions of the person are visible in the background, one on the left and one on the right.

-flashbacks

-nightmares

-disruptions in relationships

-increase in addiction or substance abuse

-dissociation

-poor judgment

-hyperarousal

Emotional Problems

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feeling trapped or hopeless
- Dysthymia
- Anger
- Poor emotional management

Tip

Many stay stuck in their emotional development.

Health Problems



-Sleep disturbance

-Sexual dysfunction

-Digestion issues

-Change in appetite

-Heart issues

“From our extensive trauma-related research, we now recognize that unaddressed trauma is the hidden cause of most preventable illnesses, and is associated with eight of the ten leading causes of death, including heart, lung, and kidney disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, suicide, and accidental overdose.” -Center to Advance Trauma Informed Health Care



Treating Trauma

Treating Trauma

-Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing

*for people with higher insight

-Internal Family Systems

*for people with high or low insight- not to be used if the trauma is ongoing

-Attachment Therapy

*for people with childhood trauma or low insight

-Talk Therapy (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Person-Centered)

*for use with aid of another therapy



Tip

Talk therapies use different ways of reframing and can be impactful if the client feels securely attached to their therapist, although they do not usually lead to long-term healing.

Other Resources

-Relatio

-Comm

-Invest

Trauma fractures the self and tends to separate the holistic being into disintegrated parts (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual). By addressing each of these parts and helping connect them to one another, the client/victim has an opportunity to reintegrate self.

Body
ction

Local Resources

Post Trauma Resources

<https://posttraumacom.wpcomstaging.com/services>

Reboot Recovery

https://rebootrecovery.com/lead-3/?utm_campaign=GoogleAds&utm_term=trauma%20group%20therapy%20near%20me&gclid=Cj0KCQjwgMChBhCYARIsAB1WQVWJUsBFDCI8TwOwgJ5hWovu6UvmXsXN3z11MUqmMskKsqbFUmWCgmsaAIPNEALw_wcB

Sexual Trauma Services

<https://silenttearssc.org/sexual-trauma-services-of-the-midlands>

Private Practices

Suicide Hotline- 988



→ **Emotional Inventory**

-situation

-physical symptoms

-emotions (specific)

-thoughts

→ **Deep Breathing**

-let's practice!



→ Clinicians

-If you have treated patients/clients with trauma, what therapy modalities have you used? What have the results been?

-Based on the information presented today, is there something you would like to do differently in therapy or start to incorporate with clients who have experienced trauma or who have PTSD?

→ Non-clinicians

-Based on the information presented today, how do you anticipate future interactions with people who reveal they have PTSD or who have experienced trauma?

-What would be an indicator that someone might need professional help?