Information handout

UK English

How Trauma Can Affect You

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How Trauma Can Affect You

Description

Trauma can result in a wide variety of symptoms, experiences, and behaviours. As well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), prevalence rates of other conditions such as panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and depression are all elevated amongst trauma-exposed individuals. Symptoms post-trauma can be powerful both physically and emotionally, and when the individual does not understand why they are occurring, they can feel especially disturbing. An important intervention is to help children and adolescents to understand that they are experiencing normal reactions to powerful events.

How Trauma Can Affect You is an illustrated information handout designed for children and young people. Clinicians may find it helpful during assessment and psychoeducation phases of treatment. It can be used to help clients to explore their symptoms & experiences, and is particularly helpful for working with clients who are struggling to describe their experiences. It can also be used to help wider networks including family systems, schools, or other professionals to understand trauma symptoms.

There are two versions of the *How Trauma Can Affect You* handout included: the first includes brief descriptions of each symptom cluster, and the second has blank boxes designed for clients to record their own experiences.

Symptoms described in the handout include:

- Feelings of fear and anxiety, including body feelings of physiological arousal.
- Flashbacks and unwanted memories of the trauma.
- Hypervigilance for potential danger.
- Negative beliefs about other people and their intentions, resulting in caution and difficulty trusting others.
- Efforts to avoid perceived danger.
- Negative beliefs about the self and one's role in events.
- Dissociative symptoms including detachment, derealisation and depersonlisation.
- Feelings of anger and frustration.
- Difficulty sleeping, including nightmares.
- Somatic discomfort including headaches, upset stomachs, and unexplained pains.

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- Difficulty concentrating.
- Feelings of sadness, loss, and hopelessness.

Instructions

"Difficult experiences like the trauma you have experienced can affect people in lots of different ways. This handout describes some of the most common experiences that people have after a trauma. I wonder if some might sound familiar to you. Would you be willing to look at it with me?"

"These are all normal reactions to difficult or stressful events. I wonder if you have ever experienced any of these?"

References

American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5 Task Force. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5™*(5th ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.

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How Trauma Can Affect You

Feeling scared

The trauma has taught your mind and body that bad things can happen. It is normal to feel scared or anxious for some time afterwards. You might notice your heart racing, feel sweaty, or feel shaky.

Flashbacks

Memories of your trauma can 'pop' – unwanted – into your mind. It can feel like the trauma is happening again right now. Memories can be of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or body feelings.

Looking out for danger

You might find that you are quick to notice anything or anyone that could hurt you. After a trauma, your brain is 'programmed' to stay on the lookout just in case there is more that could hurt you.

Difficulty trusting people

After you have been hurt by others it can be very difficult to trust anyone, even if they are not the same people who hurt you. You might feel uncomfortable being around other people.

Wanting to avoid danger

After being hurt, you might want to avoid things that remind you of what happened:

- People
- Places
- Thoughts
- Memories

Blaming yourself

Many people blame themselves for what happened to them, even though it clearly wasn't their fault. You might find yourself thinking about ways that you could have prevented it.

Dissociation

Dissociation means feeling strangely separate from your body, or the world. During a trauma your body may automatically freeze (go still) and your mind may go somewhere else (zone out). This can happen after a trauma too.

Feeling angry

You might find that you get frustrated or lose your temper easily. You might feel annoyed by the way that other people behave, or you may get cross with yourself.

Nightmares and sleeping badly

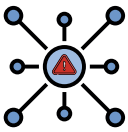
Having bad dreams or nightmares about your trauma is common. It is not unusual to wet the bed. You might find it difficult to get to sleep, or you might wake up in the night.

Feelings in your body

You might feel strong feelings in your body:

- Headaches.
- Stomach-aches.
- Unexplained pains.
- Feelings like you had during your trauma.

Problems concentrating



Any of the problems listed on this page can make it difficult to concentrate and pay attention. Do you recognise which ones affect you most?

Feeling sad

You might feel sad about the things that have happened to you. You might feel hopeless about your future. You might feel sad without even knowing why.

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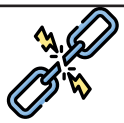
Feeling scared

Flashbacks

Looking out for danger

Difficulty trusting people



Wanting to avoid danger

Blaming yourself

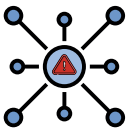
Dissociation

Feeling angry

Nightmares and sleeping badly

Feelings in your body

Problems concentrating



Feeling sad

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