

Understanding & Overcoming Trauma



A Guide for Survivors of Traumatic Experiences & Their Loved Ones

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

- i. Meet the Author1
- ii. Purpose of Toolkit2

II. Defining Trauma

- i. What is Trauma?3
- ii. Types of Trauma4
- iii. PTSD5-6

III. The Aftermath of a Traumatic Experience


- i. Effects of Trauma (Short- and Long-Term)7
- ii. Emotional Responses to Trauma8
- iii. Physical Responses to Trauma9
- iv. Cognitive Responses to Trauma10

IV. Healing from Trauma

- i. Strategies and Tips11-13
- ii. Resources for Survivors (and Loved Ones)14

V. References

- i. Sources15



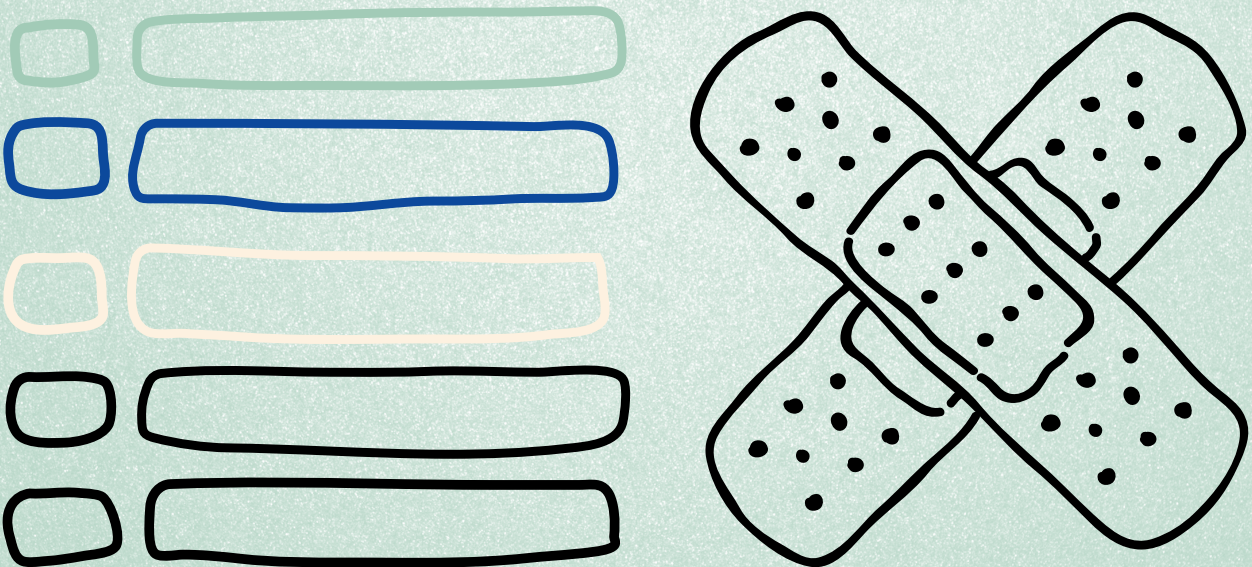
Hello! I am an undergraduate student studying Public Health at The College of New Jersey. My passion for mental health is really what drew me to NAMI Mercer. Over the course of my own journey, I have seen a substantial increase in acceptance and support toward those who struggle with mental illness. For years, I never talked about my struggles because I was terrified that I would be judged. Now, however, I proudly share my story in hopes of inspiring and helping others.

Katie Faure, Intern at NAMI Mercer



How Can This Toolkit Help Me?

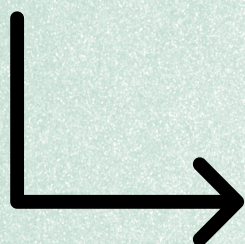
Within this toolkit, you will find strategies for coping after experiencing a traumatic event. There are tips for loved ones of survivors, too. It is important to remember that no two people's journeys will look exactly the same; rather, everyone reacts and responds differently to trauma. Some strategies may be beneficial for you while others may be less so. Pick and choose what works best for YOU.



The purpose of this toolkit is to educate and inform, and it is not intended to serve as medical advice.

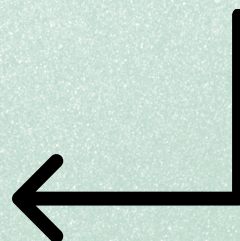
What is Trauma?

Trauma is our response to a stressful, disturbing, or even life-threatening event.



What is traumatic to one person may not be considered traumatic to another.

Our response to a traumatic event is affected by our own characteristics, developmental processes, and sociocultural factors.




Types of Trauma

#1

Acute
Trauma →

Stems from
a single
event →

Example:
Natural
disaster



#2

Chronic
Trauma →

Repeated
and
prolonged
exposures
to trauma →

Example:
Bullying



#3

Complex
Trauma →

Varied
exposures
to traumatic
events →

Example:
Abuse

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



A mental health condition that arises after experiencing (or observing) a traumatic event



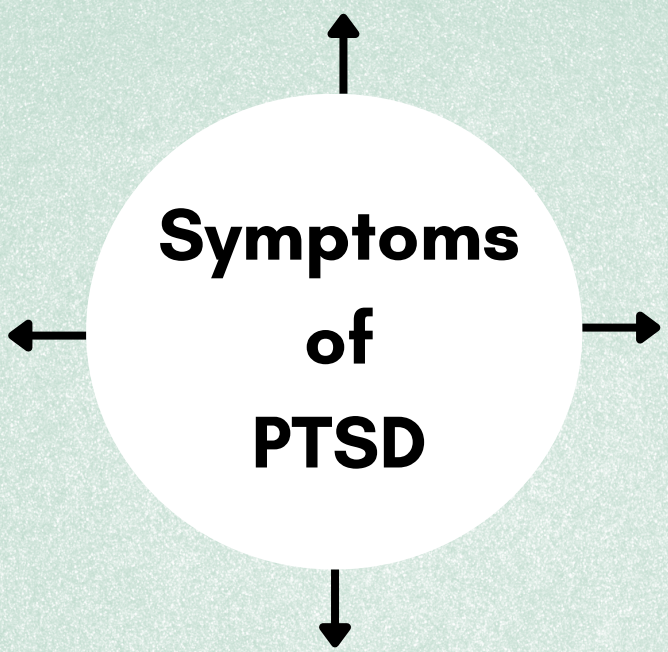
Changes in Physical & Emotional Reactions

(e.g., easily startled,
trouble
concentrating)

Avoidance

(e.g.,
avoiding
the location
where the
event took
place)

Symptoms of PTSD



Intrusive Memories

(e.g.,
flashbacks,
nightmares)

Changes in Thinking & Mood

(e.g., hopelessness,
negative thoughts
about self, feeling
"numb")

What are Some *Short-Term* Effects of Trauma?

Exhaustion

Dissociation

ANXIETY



CONFUSION



SADNESS

Agitation

What are Some *Long-Term* Effects of Trauma?

Numbness

SHAKING

Gastrointestinal problems

SHAME

Emotional Outbursts

PTSD

Substance abuse
disorders



Emotional Responses to Trauma



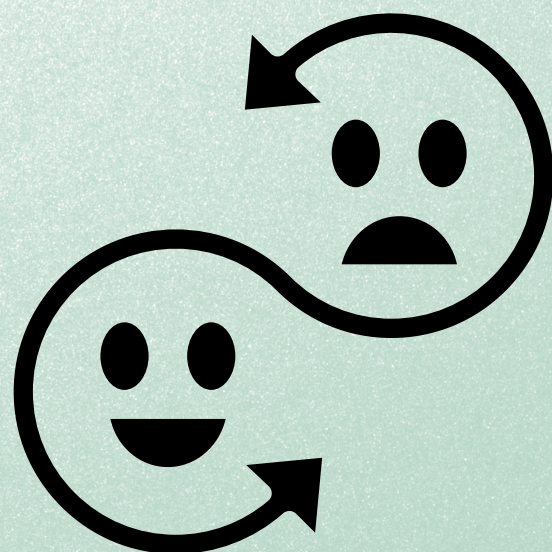
Emotional

Dysregulation

Difficulty managing emotions -> May lead to substance abuse or other high-risk behaviors

Numbing

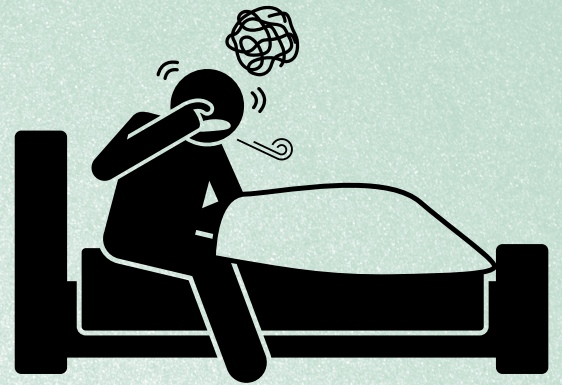
Detaching emotions from thoughts -> True emotions are hidden



Physical Responses to Trauma

Sleep disturbances

Early awakening,
nightmares,
restless sleep



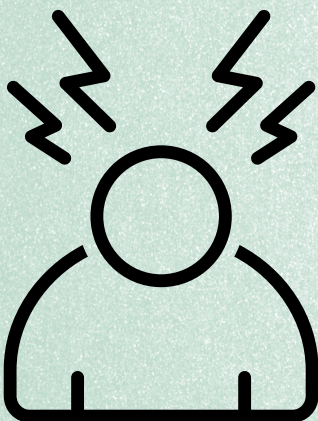
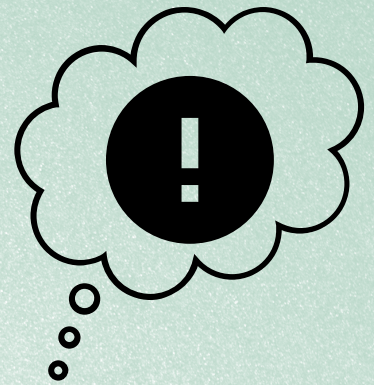
Hyperarousal

More easily startled
→ May lead to
muscle tension or
trouble sleeping

Cognitive Responses to Trauma

Cognitive Errors

Believing a situation poses a threat because it resembles a situation in which a traumatic event occurred



Intrusive Thoughts

Experiencing thoughts related to trauma -> May trigger strong emotional response

Guilt or Shame

Believing oneself is responsible for what happened during a traumatic event -> Survivor's guilt: "I survived, unlike many others in my same position."



Strategies and Tips for Coping with Trauma

Be kind to yourself

Devote time each day to self-care and relaxation (reading your favorite book, taking a walk, listening to music, etc).



Remind yourself that any symptoms or emotions you're experiencing are VALID

There is no one "right" way to feel. Gently remind yourself that you're doing the best you can in this moment.



Lean on friends and family

Your loved ones are here to support you - let them know how to do so. Communicate with them often.



Strategies and Tips for Coping with Trauma (*continued*)

Try meditation (or mindful movement!)

Consider incorporating meditation or yoga into your daily (or weekly) routine.

Here's a guided meditation to get you started.



Pick up a new hobby that allows you to express yourself

Journaling, songwriting, and drawing are all great ways to start.

Strategies and Tips for Loved Ones

Listen, Listen, Listen

One of the best ways to validate survivors of trauma is to simply listen to them. As always, be accepting and kind.



Learn Their Triggers & Know How to React if They Experience a Flashback

If they encounter a trigger (something that reminds them of a past traumatic event) or experience a flashback, remind them to take deep breaths. Be a calming presence in these moments of distress.



Be Mindful of Boundaries & Privacy

Do not share their information with others, such as mutual friends.

Resources in Mercer County

NAMI Mercer

- **Helpline: 609-799-8994 x17**
- **Email: helpline@namimercer.org**

AmlOK (for students in Mercer County)

- **Hotline (for urgent matters): 609-270-4524**
- **Email: amiok@tcnj.edu**

Traumatic Loss Prevention Services

- **609-989-6574**

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

- **Call 988**
- **Available for both English and Spanish speaking individuals**