

◎ Posttraumatic Stress  
Disorder

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# WHAT IS STRESS AND TRAUMA

- **STRESS:** is a human physical and psychological response to outside forces that disturb the normal equilibrium of every day life.
- **Traumatic stress:** is an extreme response to outside stressors termed traumatic events.
- Traumatic events differ from ordinary stressors by their intensity and tendency to cause helplessness, terror, and suffering in most people, regardless of personal characteristics.

# ORDINARY AND TRAUMATIC STRESS

Ordinary stress	Traumatic stress
Slow or gradual change	Sudden, significant loss
Wearing down over time	Piercing intensity; shock to system
Able to plan and problem solving	Overwhelming sense of helplessness
People are affected differently	terror; frightens almost any one



# HOW DO PEOPLE REACT AFTER A TRAUMATIC INCIDENT?

- In general people's reactions will
- fall into the following three groups:
- Re-experiencing the trauma in your mind.
- • Avoiding things associated with or related to the trauma.
- • Feeling more tense, irritable or over alert than usual.
- • Feeling depressed, crying.

# RE-EXPERIENCING THE TRAUMA IN YOUR MIND

- Having unwanted pictures or images of the trauma (often called flashbacks) coming into your mind.
- • Having upsetting dreams about the trauma or dreams about other things that frighten you.
- • Feeling that the trauma is happening again - strong sensations of reliving the trauma.

- Feeling very distressed at coming across situations or feelings that remind you of the trauma.
- • Experiencing distressing physical reactions, eg heart beating faster, dizziness etc. when you are faced with memories of the trauma or situations that remind you
- of it.

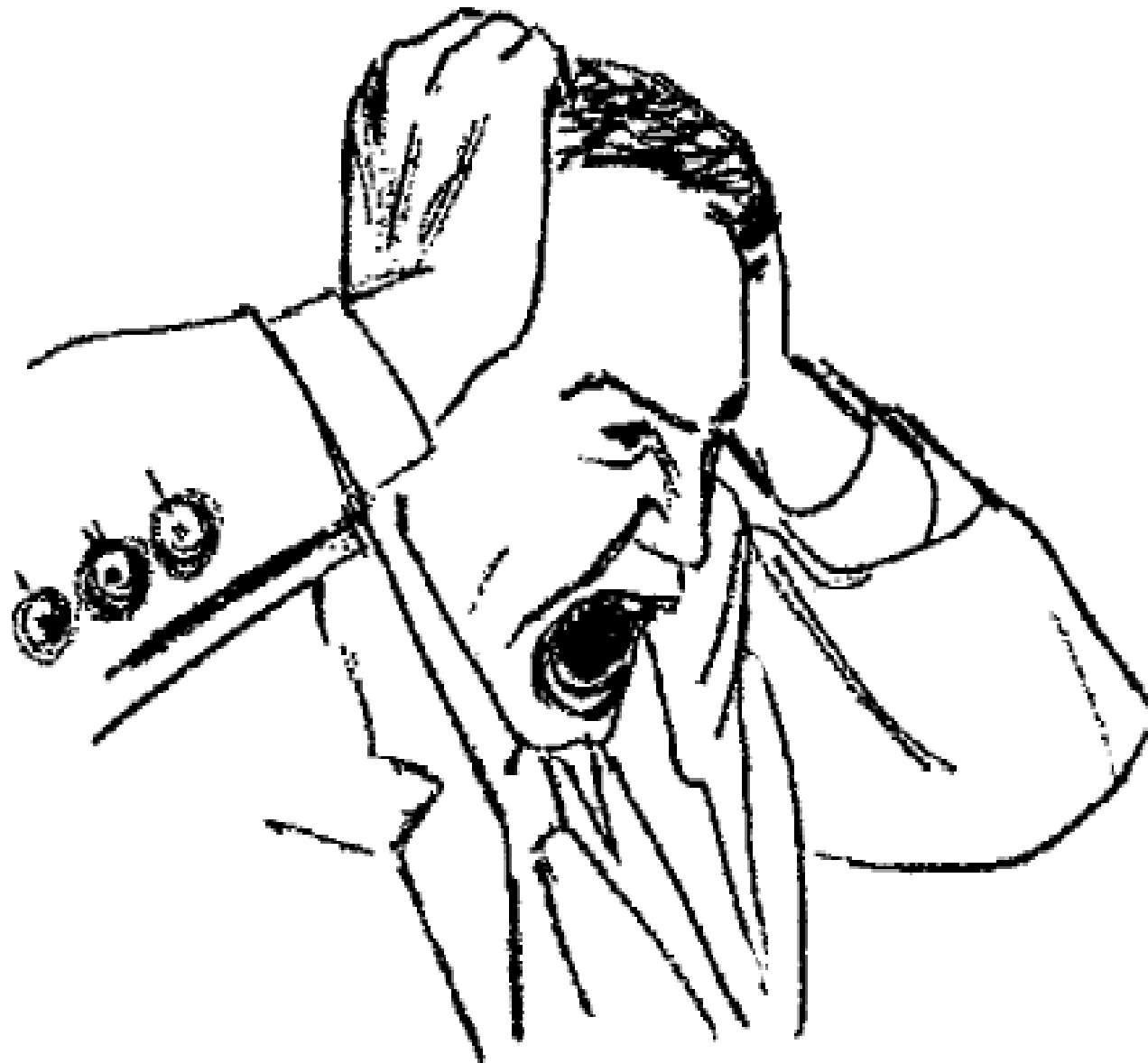


# AVOIDING THINGS RELATED TO THE TRAUMA AND NUMBING

- Trying to avoid thoughts feelings and conversations about the trauma.
- • Avoiding activities, places or people that remind you of the trauma.
- • Being unable to remember things about the trauma.
- • Losing interest in life, feeling detached from others or not having your usual feelings.
- Not feeling you will have a normal future - you may feel as though you are living on borrowed time.

# FEELING MORE TENSE AND IRRITABLE THAN USUAL

- Feeling angry or irritable
- • Not being able to concentrate
- • Finding it difficult to fall asleep.
- • Feeling over alert all the time and easily startled.



**POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS  
REACTIONS CAN AFFECT US IN AT  
LEAST FOUR DIFFERENT WAYS:**

- How we feel
- • The way we think.
- • The way our body works.
- • The way we behave.

- How do you feel?
- Anxious, nervous, worried, frightened.
- Feeling something dreadful is going to happen.
- Tense, uptight, on edge, unsettled.
- Unreal, strange, woozy, detached.
- Depressed

- What happens to your body?
- Heart races and pounds.
- Chest, feels tight.
- Muscle, are tense/stiff.
- Feel tired/exhausted.
- Body aching.
- Feel dizzy, light headed.
- Feel panicky.
- Feel depressed, low, at a loss.
- Feel angry.
- Cry.

- How do you think?
- Worrying constantly.
- Can't concentrate.
- Experience flashbacks - pictures of the trauma coming  
into your mind.
- Blame yourself for all or part of the trauma.



- Think it will happen again.
- Unable to make a decision.
- Feel regret, shame or bitterness.
- Thoughts racing
- Feel jumpy or restless.
- Stomach churning.
- Have sleep problems/nightmares.
- Easily startled.

- **What you do:**
- Pace up and down.
- Avoid things that remind you of the trauma.
- Can't sit and relax.
- Avoid people.
- Avoid being alone.
- Are snappy and irritable.
- Spoil relationship.
- Drink/smoke more.
- Depend on others too much.

- Common thoughts:
- “It was my fault” .
- “I’m cracking up” .
- “I’m going to have a heart attack” .
- “It’s controlling me” .
- “I can’t cope” .
- “I’m going to faint” .
- “Why did it have to happen?” .
- “I can’t see the point anymore” .

# WHY DO WE REACT SO STRONGLY TO TRAUMA?

- Firstly, it often shatters the basic beliefs we have about life: that life is fairly safe and secure, that life for us has a particular form, meaning and purpose.
- Secondly, trauma usually occurs suddenly and without warning. We have no time to adjust to this new experience.

# WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF OVERCOME THE TRAUMA?

- It is important to understand that the reactions you are experiencing are very common following trauma, they are
- not a sign of “weakness” or “cracking up”.
- Things that we describe which may
- help you are:

- Making sense of the trauma
- • Dealing with flashbacks and nightmares
- • Overcoming tension, irritability and anger
- • Overcoming avoidance
- • Overcoming low mood

- Make sense of the trauma:
- Try and find out as much as you can about what really happened. This will allow you to piece together a picture and understanding of the event more clearly. This can help you in your recovery. If others were involved, talk to them and ask them their views of events. Other victims, helpers from the rescue service, or passers by, may all be people who would help you gain a broader view of what happened. The rescue services are usually happy to help you in these circumstances.

- **Flashbacks and nightmares:**
- One of the best approaches which has been found to reduce flashbacks and nightmares is to make time each day for reviewing and going over the unpleasant memories or nightmares. Many people have found that if they put 20 minutes aside
- **calmly to think over, talk over or jot down notes on the trauma, that their unwanted flashbacks and nightmares will gradually become less powerful and less frequent. If you have nightmares, it may help to do this soon before you go to bed.**



- It is important to try and remember to focus on some of the **positive parts of your current situation when looking back**
- over the trauma you have experienced.

- **Overcoming tension, irritability and anger**
- **Once you have noticed early signs of tension you can prevent anxiety becoming too severe by using relaxation techniques. Some people can relax through exercise,**
- **listening to music, watching TV, or reading a book.**

- **Deep muscle relaxation** - it is helpful to read the
- instructions first and eventually to learn them . Start by selecting a quiet, warm, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. Choose a time of day when you feel most relaxed to begin with. Lie down, get comfortable, close your
- eyes. Concentrate on your breathing for a few minutes, breathing slowly and calmly: in, two-three and out, two three.
- Say the words "calm" or "relax" to yourself as you breathe out.

- **Distraction:**

- If you take your mind off your symptoms you will find that the symptoms often disappear.

- **Anger:**

- It may be worth talking over your feelings of anger with those around you. Your anger is not really directed at them but may at times be 'taken out' on them. Let them know that
- the anger is because of what you have been through. Ask for their patience until the anger and irritability passes, tell them not to 'take it personally'

- **Overcoming avoidance:**
- Try to recognize the things you are avoiding, it may help to write them down.
- **Overcoming low mood, following trauma:**
- Try to:
  - • Identify when your mood is very low.
  - • Jot down the unpleasant thoughts you are having during that time.
  - • Try and counter these thoughts by writing down arguments against them.

- ◉ Thank you
- ◉ Dr. Adnan Sarhan
- ◉ PhD Mental health