

Dealing With Trauma

Trauma comes in many varied shapes and forms and varying levels of severity. It might be an accident, a medical diagnosis or the death of a friend or family member. One of the most challenging things about any trauma is that it can affect us in unexpected ways.

Everything that happens in our lives affects us on multiple levels - physical, emotional and intellectual. The nature of the individual event combined with other factors influencing our life at the time it occurs determines what level of impact it has in each of those areas. Generally speaking the "stronger" we are when the event occurs the less it will affect us. For example, say you break your arm: if you are physically fit, strong and healthy you'll likely cope without too much difficulty with the physical challenges this presents and your body will heal quickly. If you are unfit and not in good health you'll likely find it much more difficult – for example you might not be strong enough to carry things with one hand – and your body will take longer to heal. Similarly with emotional and intellectual stressors.

Generally we would see something like a broken arm as being a predominantly physical event; however the impact it actually has on any individual will depend on their relative physical, emotional and intellectual wellbeing at the time. Physically you might be in good shape and heal quickly, but if emotionally you are vulnerable you might still end up becoming quite upset or depressed by the injury or if you are intellectually vulnerable you may find it causes you significant stress. This is why it is very important to ensure that you are taking care of your physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing on a daily basis.

Typically trauma will go hand in hand with shock. Often associated physical discomfort, emotional distress or worry will also impact upon sleep patterns. Being tired tends to amplify anxiety and stress, leading to a "perfect storm" of escalating difficulties. It's really important when you find yourself in such a situation to be gentle and patient with yourself. Don't give in to the feelings of hopelessness or inadequacy that may arise, but don't beat yourself up for having them! Take extra care to nourish your spirit as it is the best support you can have in challenging times. Take time for those activities that help you feel centred and safe. It might be meditation, reading, writing, painting, playing with your pet or children, being in nature, going for a run: whatever allows you to relax and release your focus from the traumatic event.

Give yourself the time and space you need to recover and don't compare your recovery to anyone else's or even to how you have coped with a similar event in the past. We are all unique individuals at a unique stage of our journey at any given point in time and the way we are affected by and able to respond to events reflects that. It's important to keep pushing and challenging yourself if you are struggling with your recovery, but always do it gently and kindly.