

Trauma and Readjusting to Life After Trauma

What is Trauma?

“Trauma is an emotional or psychological injury, mental harm, suffering, or damage that results from an extremely stressful or life-threatening situation.” Trauma is a very personal experience. Everyone's level of being psychologically affected by a situation may vary depending on their personality structure or the impacts of their past experiences. Trauma can develop after someone experiences or witnesses a disturbing event such as death, violence, or an accident. The probability of developing post-traumatic stress disorder is slimmer when the experienced event is not perceived as an event involving deliberate human neglect, cruelty, or ulterior motives, but as a natural event. Psychological reactions to traumatic events that affect society at large, such as natural disasters, epidemics, wars, etc. are called collective traumas because they influence to a certain extent each and every member of the society.

The mental health condition called **post-traumatic stress disorder** is similarly triggered by either experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. Symptoms include internal reminders of the event (nightmares or flashbacks), intrusive, repetitive, distressing thoughts or images, intense distress at or avoidance of external reminders of the event, apparent changes in mood or thinking, internal self-alienation, alteration in the perception of the external world, causing the patient to perceive it as unreal, or falsified, and some other physiological effects, such as increased blood pressure, fatigue, muscle tension, nausea, joint pain, headaches.

Psychological Symptoms of Trauma

- Shock, sufferer's inability to comprehend the event.
- Denying, entirely ignoring, or suppressing the traumatic event, either consciously or unconsciously.
- Intense emotions (anger, anxiety, sadness, guilt, etc.)
- Exaggerated and unreasonable thoughts arising out of feeling of insecurity (“The world is not a safe place”, “No one can be trusted”, etc.),
- Questioning reality, feeling as if one's environment is unreal, distorted or falsified,
- Self-alienation, feelings of detachment from one's mental processes or physical body.

Physiological Symptoms of Trauma

- Changes in sleep patterns and appetite
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Stomach and bowel disorders
- Muscle twitching
- Joint pain
- Diseases due to weakened immune system.

Adjusting and Healing After Trauma

The ability to re-adapt to life after trauma may vary from one person to another. Each person affected by trauma requires a certain amount of time and his or her own unique process to adjust to daily life. After a while, once the traumatic event and its psychological effects are accepted by the trauma victim, adaptation to life begins. However, the acceptance process may somewhat be arduous. As the person realizes what has happened to him/her, feelings of anger and sadness may intensify. So, it is important to seek social and/or psychological support during this process. With emotional comfort given by family, friends, co-workers and others, a person can feel better as s/he talks things through with people who listen without judging or with people who had experienced similar problems. Getting psychological support will help the person experience the processes of sharing his/her feelings, thoughts, and reactions related to the trauma with an expert, understanding the effects of the trauma, integrating his/her life before the trauma with his/her current life, and adapting to life while gaining awareness.

If you want to talk to Altınbaş University Psychological Support Unit psychologists, please send an e-mail to psychologicaldestek@altinbas.edu.tr, indicating your first name, surname, and your programme of study.

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