

Coping with PTSD



What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a series of survival responses that can become chronic if unprocessed, often presenting through moments of intrusive memories, recurring dreams, dissociation, flashbacks, or other bodily reactions to cues related to the event. PTSD can occur after any traumatic incident, such as sexual violence, police violence, medical operations, sudden loss of someone in your life, and many more. The disorder impacts our body's ability to sense when we are safe.

Similarly, Complex PTSD, or CPTSD, occurs when trauma and/or abuse has happened in childhood. This impacts us in a different way because when we are children, we are still building a sense of self and that feeling of internal safety. This earlier trauma changes the way we interpret the world and understand ourselves on a foundational level.

PTSD and CPTSD are far more common than previously believed. Millions of people are living with PTSD and working to heal. According to the National Center for PTSD, in the United States:

- About 7 or 8 out of every 100 people (or 7-8% of the population) will have PTSD at some point in their lives.
- About 8 million adults have PTSD during a given year. This is only a small portion of those who have gone through a trauma.
- About 10 of every 100 women (or 10%) develop PTSD sometime in their lives compared with about 4 of every 100 men (or 4%).¹

If you have PTSD, CPTSD, or have experienced anything even mildly traumatizing (which most of us have) you might likely have trauma reminders. These are also known as triggers, which you can learn more about [here](#).

There are ways we can show our bodies we are safe now and process some of the trauma we have experienced. Read on for some suggestions on how to work toward this.

Suggestions for coping and healing with PTSD:

Re-parenting yourself/getting stabilized

After trauma, or after a traumatic childhood, we have to teach our bodies to feel in control and safe. A great way to do that is through creating predictable routines. Trauma includes unpredictability, and so creating a predictable day, or close to it is really grounding. If we never had that as children, this is known as re-parenting, as in creating the routine and safety that we didn't receive as kids, in our current lives. This can be a bedtime routine of going to sleep around the same time every night, a noise machine, a teddy bear, lavender on your pillow etc. It can mean eating at the same times every day when possible and cooking food for yourself that makes you feel good. Another way is having nights of the week for self care scheduled, or if you see a therapist to go at the same time weekly. Re-parenting also means changing the way we talk to ourselves, picturing a sweet, younger self to encourage more compassionate self talk. This helps us unlearn the way we were spoken to by caregivers and/or the world.

Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation is when we learn either from therapists or therapy books about the impact of trauma and how to cope. This helps us understand what's happening inside our bodies and provides even more coping tools, which continue to help us feel more in control. The first step to healing is always understanding. I love the following books for this:

- *The Complex PTSD Workbook* by Arielle Swartz
- *Unf*ck Your Brain* by Faith G Harper
- *Waking the Tiger* by Peter Levine
- *Trauma & the Body* by Pat Ogden
- *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body* by David Emerson

Therapy

Trauma informed therapy provides a space to learn more about the impact of trauma and ways of coping with it.

Therapy can also provide a space to verbally or physically process trauma. Everyone needs something different from their trauma therapist. If you feel like your trauma is impacting your way of thinking, trying a more cognitive approach might be right for you, like [Cognitive Processing Therapy](#). If your trauma reactions show up physically, finding a somatic therapist who is trained in [EMDR](#), [Somatic Experiencing](#), or [Sensorimotor Psychotherapy](#) are also effective alternatives. Reading some of the books above can be helpful for determining what kind of therapy you feel like your brain and/or body is asking for. Regardless of modality, therapy should be a space to learn to feel safe again, with someone loving and affirming. When we feel connected and cared for, we heal. To find more therapy options, check out the 'metoo.' [healing resource library](#).

Trauma informed Movement

Releasing stress hormones through movement or reconnecting with the body after trauma is key to trauma healing. There are many trauma informed movement classes being offered around the world, and even if there isn't one in your area, you can always get to class early and let the teacher know some of your needs. This is most commonly found in yoga classes, but can also be available in dance,

cycling, rock climbing, and much more. It can be helpful to call the studio ahead of time and ask about potential triggers (touch, language, and attitude of the teachers). Some folks find light touch healing during yoga or other practices, and others find it powerful to be able to say you don't want hands on adjustments. When we move, we process traumatic energy that may be stuck in our nervous system, and little by little, we come home to our bodies. Finding the right kind of movement, and making sure it doesn't come along with any expectations, is a process. There is no wrong way to have a body, and there is no wrong way to connect or move it as well.

You Are Your Greatest Asset

Something to hold within you during this process of self education and healing from trauma is that we have everything we need inside of us to heal. Any outsourcing we do is for more information, tools, and support. All trauma responses are adaptations to the environment and your experiences. Your brain and body have already done an amazing job of keeping you safe.

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1. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_adults.asp