

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

What Is Grief & Trauma?

Definitions

A crisis is an emotionally significant event or unstable state of affairs that requires the transformation of existing norms. A business crisis is usually not life threatening and can be dealt with through logical and systematic methodologies to achieve its resolution. The Chinese word for crisis presents a good depiction of the components of a crisis. The word crisis in Chinese is formed with the characters for danger and opportunity. A crisis presents an obstacle, trauma, or threat, but it also presents an opportunity for either growth or decline.

Trauma on the other hand is a psychological or emotional event that has a life threatening possibility to it. Because the human organism is genetically encoded to preserve its existence, it has an emergency automatic survival system designed to engage itself in any life threatening experience. This emergency mode is not under the control of the conscious brain. Therefore the behaviors, actions and reactions of the individual(s) are mostly autonomic or instinctual rather than calculated and conscious. So, unlike a crisis, traumatic experiences cannot be immediately dealt with via logical and systematic methods to achieve a resolution as a crisis can.

“Trauma can refer to any kind of intense stress, physical or psychological, that disrupts a person’s stability (and can shatters one’s sense of security)¹. Usually, trauma is highly disturbing, makes a deep impact, shatters one’s sense of trust, and can leave people feeling immobilized.” Gary Collins

Grief is an intense, emotional suffering caused by personal loss i.e. person, object, or opportunity. It is an experience of deprivation and anxiety that can show itself in one’s behaviour, emotions, thinking, physiology, interpersonal relationships, and spirituality.

Reactions To Trauma

1. Post Traumatic Stress Response (PTSR)



2. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post Traumatic Stress Response (PTSR)

Scenario 1: A person is hijacked and shot in the arm, at 6am. He then drives himself to the nearest Police station and receives little assistance. He then drives himself to a hospital, which is accessible to his wife. The reason he does this is because his wife has to use public transport.

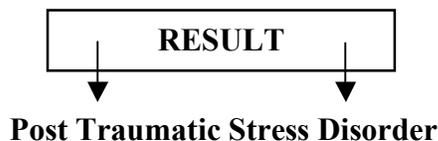
¹ Parentheses are added and are not G. Collins words.

The symptoms he experience one week after the incident is:

- Being scared of groups of people standing at intersections
- Having nightmares about the shooting
- Getting flashbacks of the gun being waved in his face while the perpetrator is shouting at him to get out of the car.
- Short-term memory loss. He suddenly finds himself getting lost in areas he previously knew very well.

Three cluster symptoms:

1. *Re-experiencing* ~ the events.
~ Memories come unexpectedly (dreams / flashbacks).
~ Victims can be confused between actual event and memory of trauma.
2. *Avoidance* ~ of people, places, things, or anything else that could bring a memory of the event.
~ May not be conscious or deliberate.
~ May lead to suicide.
3. *Hyperarousal* ~ Sleeplessness, poor concentration, frequent startle reactions, and high alertness to ways of protecting oneself.



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a psychological disorder characterized by the re-experiencing of an extremely traumatic event and the accompaniment of symptoms of increased arousal and the avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma that is outside the range of normal human experience.

Scenario 2: Following from scenario 1 (The same person experiences the following symptoms after six weeks):

- Fear of driving at night, and starting to become scared to leave the house at night
- Fear of intersections and traffic signs where there are people standing next to the road. He is starting to jump traffic lights and ignore stopping signs whenever he sees someone approaching him
- He is become increasingly angry and aggressive at home with his family, for no apparent reason he is starting to develop difficulties in his relationships with his black co-workers. This is leading to conflict at work, and his co-workers are starting to complain about him being racist.

What Traumas Cause PTSD?

- Assaults, rape
- Witnessing someone being killed
- Serious auto accidents
- Physical / sexual abuse
- Witnessing a sudden death of a significant other.

What Are The Symptoms of PTSD?

- * **Intrusive** distressing recollections of the traumatic event.
- * **Nightmares**
- * **Flashbacks**
- * **Intense distress** when confronted with reminders of the trauma
- * **Stress**, anxiety, panic
- * **Avoiding** anything associated with the event
- * **Inability** to recall a significant aspect of the trauma
- * **Detached** from others - feeling you cannot connect, with people
- * **Feeling numb**
- * **Little interest** in the things you used to enjoy

Stages Of Recovery

- *Fear & Sadness* – fear a recurrence of the event & sadness over trust in themselves & the world.
- *Denial* – convince themselves that the event did not happen or that it had no effect on them.
- *Working through fear* – learn to recognize and overcome their fear with help. Fear can be complicated by guilt (somehow they deserved it).
- *Growth* – takes place after working through the recovery stages.

How Can Help Survivors

Goals for helping...

1. Provide a safe environment where the person can talk when he/she is ready.
2. Encourage some discussion of the trauma.
3. Help with specific behaviours (new coping styles for their memories, attitudes, behaviours etc...).

Encourage them to...

- Vent their feelings
- Relax by doing something enjoyable everyday & avoid major decision making
- Eat a balanced diet
- Develop spiritual resources
- Exercise regularly
- Stay involved in the lives of others (even if you don't feel like it)
- Do not be afraid to get professional help.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS RESPONSE

Your mind needs to understand and process what's happened so you may:

- Keep thinking about the event
- Have dreams or nightmares about what happened
- Feel that it is still happening
- Feel panicky and anxious

As it is frightening and overwhelming your mind also tries to protect you by forgetting. You may:

- Avoid thinking, feeling or talking about the trauma

- Avoid people, places or activities that may remind you
- Withdraw from people and lose interest in things
- Feel numb
- Have gaps in your memory

Your body stays on standby for danger so you may:

- Be always on the alert for danger
- Get a fright or be anxious with sudden noises
- Be very irritable and get angry very quick
- Struggle to concentrate or remember things
- Have health problems
- Struggle to sleep and not feel like eating
- Guilt or shame
- The world doesn't feel like a safe place
- People cant be trusted

It is often very difficult for your family and those close to you to understand what has happened and how you are feeling. They may also be feeling quite traumatised and vulnerable.