

UNDERSTANDING
COMPLEX TRAUMA

&

Loving Self

What is Complex Trauma?

Avoidance Symptoms

What avoidance symptoms may look & feel like

- Spacing out; working too much; obsessively cleaning; sleeping too much
- Staying too busy and inability to relax
- Amnesia: inability to recall trauma, events, or periods of time
- Numbness and detachment from self-and/or others
- Inability to feel good
 - Being on autopilot; feeling robotic
 - Isolation from others and places
 - Reluctance to talk about trauma, feelings, and emotions

Intrusive Symptoms

What intrusive symptoms may look & feel like

- Flashbacks (auditory, body sensations, images, intrusive thoughts, intense emotions)
- Reliving aspects of traumatic memory (with or without awareness)
 - Involves smells, images, sounds, taste, feelings, thoughts, or physical sensations
 - Nightmares, hallucinations, or delusions
- Severe anxiety reactions and physical sensations
- Feeling paralyzed and cannot move or speak

Emotional Dysregulation

Hyper Arousal: Flight/Fight/Freeze

- Persistent tension, muscle tenseness, agitation, restlessness and/or impatience
- Jumpy, easily startled and/or hypervigilance
- Irritability, anger and/or rage
- Emotional and/or anger outbursts
- Insomnia, inability to relax and/or restlessness
- Concentration difficulties, ADHD, ADD



- Utilize internal self-compassion and cooperation
- Consider how rigidity gets in the way
- Identify parts of you that need soothing
- Understand and validate part's feelings
- Respect all parts
- Examine the 'Pros and Cons'
- Use a rating system (scale 1-5)
- Make conscious and mindful decisions
- Be patient and gentle

Tips for Working w/ Triggers

- Remind yourself of options; not helpless anymore
- "Inner Safe Place" neutralizes trigger effects
- Parts of you may voluntarily go to sleep in "Inner Safe Place"
- Imagine a shield/cloak that neutralizes triggers
- Use "Container Exercise" for remaining unresolved feelings
- Distinguish past from present
- Ground yourself; touch something
- Bring parts of you back to present over & over again
- Notice what is different about you
- Share mutual support and talk to all parts inwardly

Tips for Daily Life

Remember Everyone NEEDS...

- Relaxation and pleasure
- Personal reflection time
- Physical movement
- Connection with others



Hypo Arousal: Shut Down/Fright

- Emotional numbness; feeling nothing or very little
- Physical numbness and/or inability to feel pain
- Blank mind; unable to think or concentrate
- Profound detachment from self-and/or others
- Inability to move and/or respond
- Extreme drowsiness; feeling of shutting down

Somatic Symptoms

What somatic symptoms may look & feel like

- Headaches, pain, stomach problems, tension and/or elimination problems etc.
- Often mislabeled hypochondriacs
- Problems are real and are felt deeply
- Unexplained pain and/or body sensations
- Autoimmune responses and disorders

What is Dissociation?

Understanding Dissociation

Foundation is to BE IN THE PRESENT

- Dissociation is about the past
- It comes from attempts at escaping real or perceived threats
- It stems from situations that were too painful to realize and be present with
- It is our minds way of helping us during crisis and pain
- Triggers are uncomfortable body sensations, emotions, thoughts and/or images
- When it continues long past traumatic event(s),
- it creates internal stress and conflict



Dissociation Looks & Feels Like

It is more common than you think and does not mean you are crazy

- Feeling foggy, spacey, fuzzy and/or not real

- Losing connection with the present moment
- Being in 'Preoccupied Mind'
 - Engulfed in negative images, feelings, or thoughts of past
 - Engulfed in worries of the future
- Being aware of actions without control, as if watching yourself
- Lost time: coming to and realizing time has passed without awareness in moment
- Retreating to deep inner fantasy and daydreams

Healthy Awareness Is Opposite of Dissociation

What awareness looks & feels like

- Being in the present moment
- Inner parts of self-negotiate and collaborative
- Ability to distinguish between past from present
- Having a stable sense of self
- Able to connect life experiences
- Able to recall past without confusion, pain, and chaos
- Owning behaviors, emotions, sensations, and memories as mine
- Having a coherent life story

**Dissociation is simply a lack of integration when an event is too much, too soon and too fast to fully understand and process*

Common Symptoms of Complex Trauma

- Thoughts, feelings, behaviors or memories do not belong to me
- Hyperarousal: feeling too much
- Hypoarousal: feeling too little
- Amnesia: not remembering chunks of time
- Time Distortion: time & space feel out of ordinary
- Depersonalization: feeling alienated from body
- Derealization: feeling alienation from surroundings



Evidence Based Tips for Healing Complex Trauma

Tips to "Feeling Too Much"

- Mindfully choose a temporary distraction
- Exercise or walk
- Do something fun and pleasant
- Listen to music and/or dance
- Call and/or meet a friend
- Engage in a hobby, puzzle, or game
- Read a book or watch a show
- Watch funny videos, or a comedic show

Tips to "Feeling Too Little"

- Bring in sensory experiences to awaken
- Observe & Describe how you feel: "I am stressed & shutting down"
- Help parts of you feel safer (safe enough) or calmer
- Remind your parts of the present time
- Slowly smell and take in your favorite essential oil
- Do brief moderate to vigorous activity
- Look around your environment; use the 5 senses
- Stimulate your brain with something active
- If paralyzed, ask if a part inside can help you move
- If cold or freezing, take a warm shower or bath
- If numb, note where in your body it begins and where it ends
- Observe where you can feel, even the tiniest bit
- Ask parts of you to share "a little emotion" with you
- Be curious to what part is shutting down?



Tips for Healthier Decision Making

- Imagine accurate outcomes from making important decisions
- Develop 'CopeAhead' plans
- Practice 'Gathering Space' and inner communication

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w/ Love, Stacy Ruse, LPC. EMDRIA Approved Consultant. IFS Approved