

RIGHT DIRECTION

Trauma and PTSD: How to Support
Employees Impacted by Trauma



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Today's Speaker



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HOW TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES



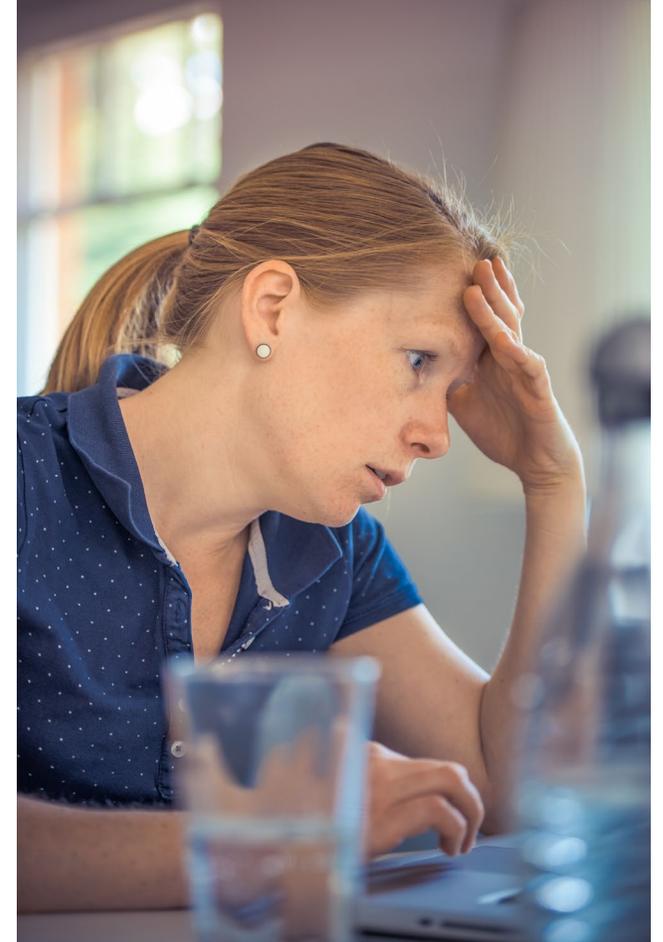
What is “trauma?”

What are the impacts of trauma?

How can you support team members impacted by trauma?

WHAT PERCENTAGE
OF PEOPLE
EXPERIENCE A
TRAUMATIC EVENT IN
THEIR LIFETIME?

- a) 10%
- b) 30%
- c) 50%
- d) 70%



WHAT IS “TRAUMA”: DSM-V DEFINITION (FOR PTSD DIAGNOSIS)

Diagnostic & Statistical Manual
of Mental Disorders, 5th edition
(DSM-V)

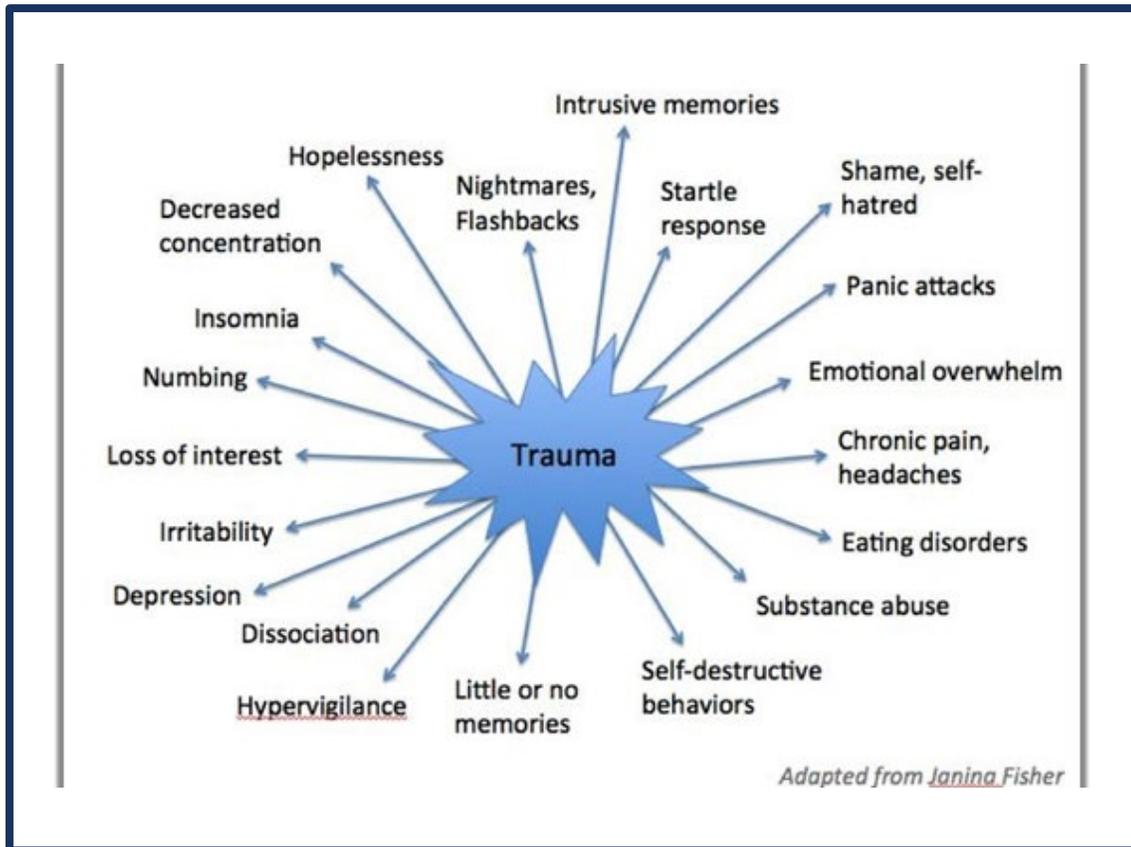
- "Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:"
 - “Directly experiencing the traumatic event
 - Witnessing, in person, the traumatic event
 - Learning that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event must have been violent or accidental...(pg. 271)”.

Prevalence of PTSD

(National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder):

- 10% of women
- 4% of men

WHAT IS “TRAUMA”: SAMSHA DEFINITION



- Trauma “refers to experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions. It...refers to [event/s], or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing (*SAMHSA, 2014).”
- The traumatic event usually overwhelms an individual’s resources to cope
- Typically involves feelings of helplessness and loss of control

Figure: <https://ancestorsandarchetypes.weebly.com/sacred-wounding.html>

* SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

THE THREE E'S OF TRAUMA

Events

*Events/circumstances
cause trauma*

Experience

*An individual's
experience of the event
determines whether it
is traumatic*

Effects

*Effects of trauma
include adverse
symptoms and
consequences*

Slide adapted From: Kehl (2016)

TYPES OF TRAUMA



-
- Physical abuse or assault
 - Sexual abuse or assault
 - Victim or witness to interpersonal, domestic, or community violence
 - Natural or manmade disaster
 - War, terrorism, or political violence
 - Military trauma
 - Serious accident (e.g. car accident)
 - Traumatic loss or separation

TRAUMA



A traumatic experience can be a:

- Single event
- Series of events
- Chronic condition

Individuals may:

- Experience the traumatic event directly
- Witness an event
- Hear about an event that affects someone they know

Trauma can affect anyone and people of every:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Gender
- Psychosocial background
- Geographic region

TRAUMA IMPACTS PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY



Temporary, quickly
resilient response
(subclinical)

Clinically significant
response, but does
not meet criteria for
diagnosable trauma
disorders
(sub-threshold stress
reactions)

More prolonged and
severe response
(PTSD, Acute stress
disorder, depression,
anxiety disorders,
substance use
disorders)

TRAUMATIC-STRESS RESPONSE IS A NORMAL REACTION TO AN ABNORMAL EVENT/S



IMPACTS OF TRAUMA



EMOTIONAL



PHYSICAL



COGNITIVE

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO TRAUMA



- **Traumatic stress tends to evoke two emotional extremes:**
 - Feeling either too much emotion (overwhelmed)
 - Feeling too little emotion (numbing)
- **Emotions most likely to surface include:**
 - Anger
 - Fear
 - Sadness
 - Anxiety
 - Shame
 - Feeling out of control (e.g., a sense of “losing it”)
- **Emotional dysregulation: difficulty regulating emotions**

PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Somatization: includes somatic (body) complaints

- Gastrointestinal
- Cardiovascular
- Neurological
- Musculoskeletal
- Respiratory

Hyperarousal

- The body's way of remaining prepared
- Characterized by muscle tension; a lower threshold for startle responses; etc.
- Hypervigilance

Sleep disturbance:

- Can come in the form of:
 - Early awakening
 - Restless sleep
 - Difficulty falling asleep
 - Nightmares

COGNITIVE REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Trauma can lead individuals to see:

- Themselves as incompetent or damaged
- Others and the world as unsafe and unpredictable
- The future as hopeless (believing personal suffering can occur any time)

Re-experiencing the trauma: flashbacks, intrusive/unwanted thought, memories, etc.

Exhibit 1.3-2: Cognitive Triad of Traumatic Stress



Figure: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2014.

SIGNS VS. SYMPTOMS

What might this look like?

- Being late to work
- Trouble concentrating, solving problems, being easily distracted
- Difficulty retaining new information
- Looking tired/sleepy
- Tearfulness (stepping away from desk more frequently)
- Irritability, more impulsive reactions
- More argumentative
- Scanning the environment (hypervigilance)
- Withdrawal from social situations
- Easily startled
- Change in appearance



I FEEL CONFIDENT IN
MY ABILITY TO
SUPPORT A
COLLEAGUE IMPACTED
BY TRAUMA?

- a) Yes
- b) No



HOW TO HELP EMPLOYEES IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

- Set the stage for a supportive culture
- Pay attention and notice changes in your employees
- Have supportive conversations
- Be flexible (help identify temporary solutions)
- Create a sense of safety
- Refer to available resources



SET THE STAGE: CREATE A CULTURE OF OPENNESS, ACCEPTANCE, & SUPPORT

- Offer pro-active check-ins to foster open communication
 - Schedule weekly, bi-weekly, monthly check-ins.
 - Engage in impromptu check-ins during times of status quo
 - Keep lines of communication open via email, text, phone, in addition to in-person/virtual
- Facilitate social support among colleagues
 - Team-building exercises, volunteer activities
 - Mentoring



PAY ATTENTION (I.E., NOTICE)

- The first step is noticing there is a change
 - Is there some indication of distress?
- Common reactions after traumatic stress may include:
 - Reduced concentration and decision making
 - Withdrawal
 - Tearfulness/crying spells
 - Increased irritability, irrational anger



ACKNOWLEDGE THE EVENT/S



Acknowledge the event:

- Acknowledge that what has happened is distressing and you are sorry for their pain
- If colleagues are not aware, ask the employee how much they want shared

Do not judge:

- How someone processes stress or trauma is dependent on that individual

Avoid “harmful positivity”:

- While positive statements may be shared to offer support, they can feel dismissive of the struggle and pain
 - “At least...”
 - “Stay positive.”
 - “Everything will turn out for the best.”
 - “It must be part of a bigger plan.”

SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS



It can be hard to start the conversation!

- Be warm, but clear and to the point
 - Practice if helpful
- Try starting with objective observations:
 - Notice changes in behavior that are not typical for the person and ask about them

SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS

- Tell them you are worried about them and ask about what is bothering them.
 - *You don't seem yourself lately.*
 - *I am wondering if you can share with me what might be going on as I would really like to help.*

“Sue, I noticed you have come to work late a few times this weeks and you seem distracted. I want to check-in on you. How you are doing? Can I support you in any way. Have you noticed this change recently?”



EMPATHIC & ACTIVE LISTENING



Support can simply mean listening

- Support does not have to be mean problem solving, rescuing or giving advice
- Actively listening alone can help employees on their healing journey

Active listening

- When a person is done speaking, confirm what you heard by rephrasing it and asking if you understood correctly
- Seek clarification if needed

Leave it up to the person how much they want to talk/share

- Do not push/rush
- Avoid asking intrusive questions

BE FLEXIBLE & PROBLEM SOLVE WAYS TO SUPPORT SUCCESS AT WORK

Ensure adequate time and space to re-center after a traumatic event/loss

- Unrealistic to expect a quick/immediate return to “business as usual”

Ask employees what the need

- “What would be most helpful right now?”
- “I am happy to just to listen, or I can explore solutions with you.”

Temporarily adjust expectations where possible

- Can you help improve functioning at work?
 - E.g. Offer Quiet space
- Can you change duties temporarily
 - E.g. Less client/customer facing duties

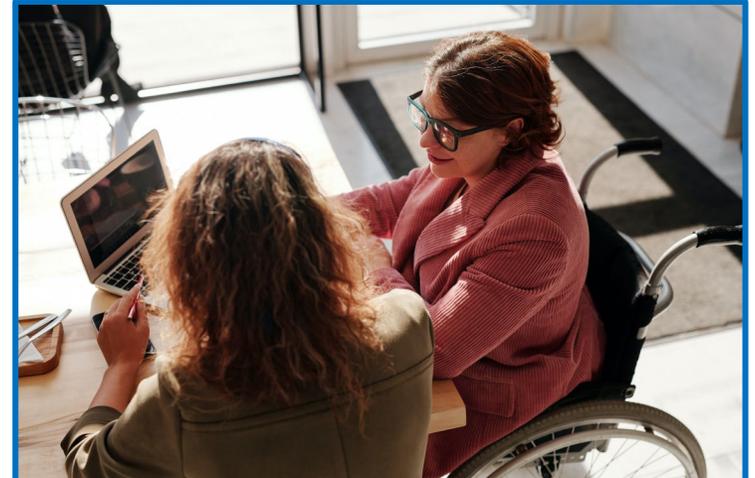
CREATE A SENSE OF SAFETY

Reduce triggers/”re-traumatization”

- Ask employees to identify trauma triggers
- Work together to identify solutions to reduce trauma triggers

Physical safety considerations

- Security
- Access to exits
- Opportunities for privacy



REFER TO SUPPORT RESOURCES



“Sometimes things can feel overwhelming. Here are resources you may find helpful at any point in the future.”

- **Set boundaries**
 - It is not your role to diagnose, treat, or counsel employees
- **Ensure employees know what resources are available to them through the workplace**
 - Include information related to physical and mental health
 - Employee assistance programs (EAP)
 - Company resources (peer support)
 - Share company leave policies/HR benefits
- **Offer, but do not push**
 - A person will accept support when ready

REMAIN SUPPORTIVE FOR THE LONG TERM



- It takes longer to recover from a traumatic event than most people realize
- Some individuals experience traumatic stress weeks or months later (or longer)
- Certain dates can be “triggering,” such as anniversaries of an event or holidays

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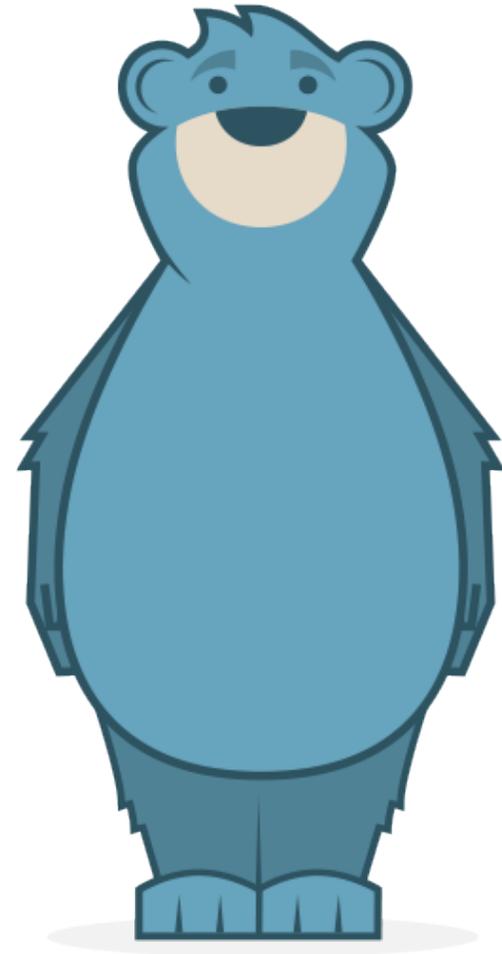
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Q&A

