

Practical Strategies for Coping after Trauma

Trauma can affect people in many different ways. Intrusive symptoms of traumatic stress – like flashbacks, memories, and upsetting thoughts – cannot always be stopped, but we can learn techniques that will help minimise their impact.

Increasing Support

- Generally the more social support someone has the faster they recover from trauma.
- Unfortunately trauma can have a negative effect on our ability to form and maintain healthy, positive, stable relationships.
- Look for opportunities to increase the quality and/or quantity of your connections with groups, family, friends, teachers or supportive others.

Minimising Triggers

- Identify any things/situations that trigger you.
- Minimise these triggers where possible
 - Look at work, home, school environments and identify possible changes;
 - Alert relevant people if needed so you can plan ahead.
- Make a plan as to how you can manage being triggered
 - Identify somewhere to go that you feel safe (or someone to go to);
 - Identify preferred grounding techniques you can use to lower anxiety / distress;
 - Practice controlled breathing.
- Try to re-integrate into normal routine as soon as you feel you are able to.

Managing Distress

- Deep Breathing (breathe in for 3 seconds & out for 6 seconds).
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (flex and relax to the count of 5 for each part of the body).
- Visualise a safe place in your mind.
- Mindfulness - focus on the here and now.
- Say positive things or affirmations in your mind.

Self-Soothing Strategies Using the 5 Senses

- Vision – pictures, sunset
- Hearing – music, surrounding sounds
- Smell – perfume, essential oils
- Taste – favourite treat
- Touch – hug someone, pat a dog or cat.

Cheer Leading Statements

- When times are tough or when you find yourself in a difficult situation, it is okay to say positive statements to yourself such as

“I’m okay”

“I’m a strong person”

“I can do this”

“The fact that I say no to someone does not make me a selfish person”

Building a ‘Container’ for Trauma Memories & Thoughts

- If thoughts or memories of trauma come to mind at inappropriate times, imagine a container in which to ‘put’ them.
- Create / visualise a container that works for you - such as an old spaghetti sauce jar or shoe box.
- Practice putting memories away into the container.
- Ask - where will you keep these memories?
- It may be appropriate for you to access the ‘container’ of memories when you attend counselling.
- It may be a good idea to use this container before sleep.

Grounding Techniques

MENTAL

Focusing your mind

- Describe your environment in detail – name 3 things you can see now
- Play a ‘categories’ game with yourself
- Describe an everyday activity in detail
- Imagine something nice
- Say a safety statement such as *“As I look around me I can see that I am here today, and not back in the past”*.
- Read something, saying each word to yourself
- Use humour
- Count to 10 or say the alphabet very slowly.

PHYSICAL

Focusing on your senses

- Run cool or warm water over your hands
- Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can
- Touch various objects around you
- Dig your heels into the floor or stamp your feet – feel the power in your legs
- Carry a grounding object such as a smooth stone or piece of jewellery
- Jump up and down
- Notice your body – the way your body rests in the chair or how your feet touch the ground
- Stretch
- Clench and release your fists
- Walk slowly noticing each footstep
- Eat something, describing the flavours
- Focus on your breathing.

SOOTHING

- Talking to yourself in a very kind way – be your own best friend
- Say kind statements *“I am okay; I am safe now”*
- Think of favourites
- Picture people you care about
- Remember words to an inspiring song, quotation or poem
- Remember a safe place
- Say a coping statement
- Plan a safe treat for yourself
- Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week.

Getting Physical

- Tension and excess adrenaline and cortisol can be held in the body when on high alert.
- Physical activity & movement will discharge the chemicals, release tension and help you to calm down.

Examples:

Walking, dancing, pacing, running, stretching, gardening, moving furniture around.
Something that integrates physical and mental activity is ideal: Wii sports, yoga, trampoline, sports, basket-ball, drumming etc.

Have Distractions on hand for times of Anxiety

Examples:

Cross-word puzzles, Sudoku, play-dough, rubix cube, apps on iPad involving visual-spatial tasks.



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