

Response to Trauma

Psychological trauma most often arises from abusive interpersonal events – child abuse, rape, domestic violence, captivity, combat – events in which one fears for one’s life or the life of others or experiences intense fear, helplessness or horror, or from the witnessing or learning of a violent tragic event. The experience of betrayal magnifies the negative power of the experience and can be the difference between what is simply a bad experience, and a traumatic experience.

From a spiritual perspective, betrayal is often experienced as a betrayal of God. From this perspective even natural disasters, which have no human cause, are spiritually traumatic.

When a disaster occurs, the effects are far reaching. The victims, friends and family members, rescue workers, healthcare providers, and, because of power of the power of the media, even people on the other side of the globe can all feel the effects of a large scale disaster.

As many as one in four of the people you encounter may have been deeply wounded by life experiences. Natural disasters or other tragedies can be triggers for persons who have experienced past trauma and for persons living with serious mental illness.

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD, an anxiety disorder) is the term used by mental health professionals when the psychological trauma has reached certain intensity.

People can experience secondary PTSD symptoms related to the traumatic event even though they did not actually experience the trauma themselves.

Symptoms of PTSD

For some people, symptoms begin almost right away after the trauma happens. For others, the symptoms may not begin or may not become a problem until years later.

PTSD is diagnosed by professionals when several of the symptoms described below persist for more than six months. But people can experience the woundedness which these symptoms express even when it is not severe enough to constitute PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD may include:

Repeatedly thinking about the trauma. Intrusive thoughts about the trauma, flashbacks and nightmares may occur unexpectedly or when something triggers memories of the event.

Being constantly alert or on guard.

A person may be easily startled or angered, irritable or anxious and preoccupied with staying safe. Some people find it hard to concentrate. Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep and physical problems can occur.

Avoiding reminders of the trauma.

People may not want to talk about the event or be around people or places that remind them of the event. They may also feel emotionally numb, detached from friends and family, and lose interest in activities.

How Faith Communities Can Promote Healing

- Provide educational opportunities for faith leaders and congregations to learn about the effects of trauma.
- Provide a safe place for persons to share their story and their feelings.
- Be aware of resources in your community and know when it is appropriate to refer.
- Encourage higher levels of physical self-care for congregants and others with histories of trauma: more rest, healthier food, adequate exercise.

- Use your faith tradition to focus on forgiveness, healing and restoration.
- Plan a community event using topical studies focusing on resilience instead of trauma.
- Use sacred space for self-soothing, such as prayer, meditation, breathing and worship.
- Plan a worship and/or memorial service to pray for the victims of trauma.
- Find things about which to give thanks and do so.

Traumatic experiences may expose some vulnerabilities, but they can also be opportunities to show strength and resiliency.

"Trauma is simply a technical term for wound. The diagnosis of PTSD reflects a wound of a certain severity, but you can be wounded even though you don't have PTSD. Trauma wounds relationships with others and God. So personal, spiritual, and congregational relationships are a very important part of the healing."

Rev. Jackson Day
Executive Director, ICWV

Thus says the Lord, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (Isaiah 43:1-2)

There is Help!

There is Healing!

There is Hope!

For More Information

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies
www.istss.org

NAMI's Veterans Resource Center
www.nami.org/veterans

National Center for Trauma-informed Care
www.samhsa.gov/nctic

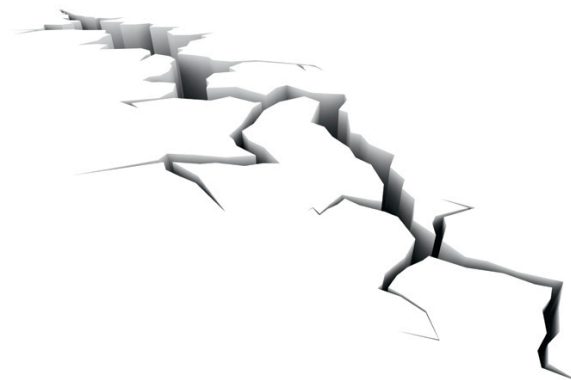
Sidran Institute
www.sidran.org
www.riskingconnection.com

The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs
www.ptsd.va.org

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
www.nimh.nih.gov

International Conference of War Veterans Ministers
www.warveteranministers.org/ptsd.htm

Transforming Psychological Trauma



How Faith Communities Can Promote Healing

Mental Health Ministries