

TRAUMA MANAGEMENT: A BASIC GUIDE TO SELF-HELP



Introduction

This guide has been developed by specialists at South Florida Arts & Counseling for people who have ever experienced one or more traumatic events in their lives. Each aspect contained in it is related to treatment components according to the Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) model, developed by Anthony Mannarino, Judith Cohen and Esther Deblinger, being, at the same time, oriented to the management of depressive and/or mild anxiety disorders of those who have suffered trauma, as well as to family members who are interested in learning related to this process and the mechanisms to follow to help in their recovery.

What is trauma?

We have all suffered stress from time to time, and its effects are usually quite disturbing. Psychological traumas are caused by some event that occurred suddenly or unexpectedly, in which the individual does not have the possibility to handle the problem, causing it to disturb him, given the level of stress that is generated. This stress can be caused by arguments with family or friends or by any other situation in everyday life. However, in certain circumstances, it could reach higher levels of stress compared to normal stress. Therefore, these types of events where stress can be extreme are known as traumas.

Similarly, traumas commonly constitute situations where someone has been injured, abused, or has been at risk of death. Traumas usually produce many feelings such as confusion, terror, helplessness, anger, or numbness. So, when someone deals with trauma they go into a kind of survival mode, using responses like flight, fight or freeze.

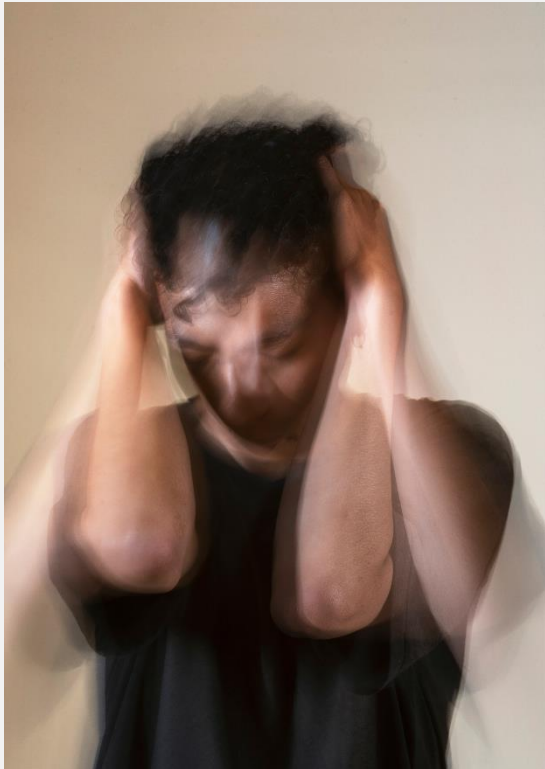
When the traumas are repeated, the person can remain "stuck" in this survival mode, which is why feelings of insecurity or lack of control of their own life, distrust or fear of approaching other people can emerge. In addition, those who suffer from trauma can experience various conflicts with others, feel that nobody cares about them, etc. Therapy, in this case, is a mechanism that greatly benefits these people in overcoming these kinds of distressing feelings and thoughts and, eventually, beginning to enjoy their lives and social relationships.

What types of traumas are there?

There are different kinds of traumas. For example, some denominations are detailed below:

- Acute Trauma: This is the result of a single dangerous or stressful event.
- Complex trauma: consequence of exposure to various traumatic situations.

- Chronic trauma: effect of repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful events. Examples include cases of domestic violence, child abuse, or bullying.
- Secondary trauma, another form of trauma. With it, an individual can develop symptoms of trauma from being in contact with someone who has suffered a traumatic event. For example, family members of the victim, mental health specialists, and others who care for those who have been through a traumatic event are at risk of vicarious trauma.



How can trauma affect us?

Many people have dreams or memories related to their trauma that are very disturbing. Some feel tension, others nervousness or anger. After the trauma, the person almost always remains in expectation of the occurrence of negative events or danger. They often have trouble falling asleep or difficulty concentrating when performing certain tasks, they generally do not want to talk about the trauma, they react in an extremist way, they feel overwhelmed or depressed when certain memories come back, as if they were experiencing it again. Some people may feel empty and numb, disconnected with the environment and with reality, which may lead them to want to use drugs, alcohol, harm themselves,

fight, overeat or leave home to try to manage their feelings. or reactions to trauma.

Do you feel identified with any of the above aspects?

Have you ever dealt with reactions like these reactions?

How can we manage memories about trauma?

Trauma memories are the things that remind you of the trauma itself. These can be situations, places, words, smells, people, sounds, images, sensations, etc., but they are not dangerous. Surely, if you usually experience all this, you may feel insecure or as if you are experiencing the trauma again. This could lead to behaviors or strong emotional reactions that do not fit the situation or that can lead to problems with other people, all of which represent obstacles in your life.

However, by being aware of all this, you can develop mechanisms that allow you to relax and deal with your feelings and memories, thus helping you to manage your emotional reactions much better.

Your therapist and other people you receive support from can also help you gradually progress in this regard, allowing you to deal safely with events that bring back memories of your traumas, so that you do not continue to avoid them. For example, something useful to start working on is to list the things that remind you of your trauma. Another very important aspect is that you go to receive help from a therapist, with whom you will have to develop a plan for managing these reminders of the trauma, learning, in addition, to combat the feelings associated with it.

Through therapy, you will practice at home or in sessions how to be in control of all these things that disturb your life.

How to calm down?

Once the traumas occur you can experience nervousness, anxiety, tension and other emotions that we have already mentioned before. This happens when you are facing high stress or some danger. The human body releases stress hormones to survive, so it can be difficult to concentrate, feel calm, sleep, etc. However, you can do things that make you calm down. Some of these are sometimes not beneficial, such as studying for an exam, even if they are positive in the long run. It all comes down to thinking about what generally makes you feel calm and relaxed so you try them, or receive and try your therapist's recommendations.

Ideas to relax

We all achieve calm differently, but you can try, for example:

1. Focused Breathing
2. Progressive relaxation at the muscular level
- The meditation
4. Listen to music
5. Practice exercises or yoga
6. Carry out comforting activities like taking a relaxing bath
7. Talk to other people
8. Read

Have any of these activities ever been good for you? Think about the ones that would give you the most satisfaction and practice them regularly.

After applying any of these suggestions, you can dedicate yourself to thinking about what helped you the most, what obstacles you had or if you could try something else.

What to do with feelings?

Feelings are emotions experienced at the body level and in the heart. We can experience countless different feelings and these, in turn, change from one moment to the next. However, there are no good or bad feelings, but there are negative and positive ways to express them. In this case, it might be useful to write down or name all the possible feelings and at the same time try to describe them, determine if there are colors related to them, etc.

What if I don't feel anything?

Some people who have experienced trauma report feeling numb or having trouble identifying their feelings. Others, on the other hand, find it difficult to express them. Have you ever felt this? Can something be done about it? Of course, yes, although it would be much better if a specialist evaluated your particular case in order to define which strategies to follow based on your improvement.



The expression of feelings in the body

To understand emotions, it is necessary to pay close attention to our body. When a stressful situation occurs, what do you feel? In what part of the body does this emotion manifest?

Our body is an excellent indicator of all possible signals to understand our emotions. Therapy can help a lot in this. For example, with your specialist, you could also list your feelings associated with the trauma, close your eyes, imagine yourself experiencing it at that moment and determine where in your body you feel it and comment on it or draw it, or perhaps express it facially or through gestures, and that's it. your therapist will tell you what to do.

Are your feelings intense?

Emotions can be perceived both lightly and intensely. You can try to give your feelings a classification, in the same way that a thermometer tells us the temperature. Each number will indicate the intensity of a feeling, and this is just one of the simplest ways to identify it, which means there are many others you could try. And you will ask yourself: what is this for me? This contributes to gaining awareness of how intense your emotions are, and is one of the pillars to help you manage your feelings.

Managing difficult emotions

Not all emotions are positive. When we feel happy, enthusiastic, interested, curious, grateful, or in love, we obviously experience positive sensations in our lives that make us feel good. Negative emotions, on the other hand, can be difficult at times, such as when we feel sad, lonely, angry, jealous, rejected or afraid, especially when these types of emotions are experienced very frequently or with a certain intensity. However, there is the possibility of avoiding it, managing them properly, even if we think it is difficult.

First, we must remember that all emotion is temporary, so steps can be taken to reduce its intensity. For example, if our anger is at a level 8 (strong), we can think about what we could do to reduce it to a level 1 or 2. What to do? We could come up with a list of skills by which to manage these difficult emotions, or talk to a therapist about options for identifying these emotion management skills.



Review of skills for managing emotions

Throughout the day, you could review the emotions you have experienced during the day, responding to aspects such as: how do you feel now? how would you rate your emotions at this moment in a range from 1 to 10? Did you try any skills during the week to manage the emotions that you have perceived in yourself? Was there an impediment? Can you do something to overcome them? How have you felt applying this technique?

Become aware

Becoming aware of emotions involves focusing our attention on what is happening in the present moment and calmly examining the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that are occurring in the body, without making judgments. Doing so is very favorable when we get stuck in memories or in those feelings or thoughts that have caused us pain. There are various ways to practice mindfulness. You can even have a conversation with your therapist about those activities that you could do. Some examples of these are: take breaths; pay full attention when you eat, run or walk; listening to music, etc., but all with full awareness of what you are doing.

Do thoughts matter?

Thoughts definitely disturb feelings and the way we act. Whenever something happens, we think about it. This influences our feelings and the way we act. For this reason, you could list some of the most recent thoughts you had that day, how they made you feel, and what you did about them.

Negative thoughts

Many times, it happens that the thoughts that go through our minds are not totally useful or true. For example, sometimes we may focus on the worst results or only the negative things in any aspect, person or situation, and these thoughts stick in our minds. For example, something may go wrong for us, say an exam or the breakup of a relationship, however, we are left with the fixed thought that "I will never pass this subject" or "I will never be happy", which affects undoubtedly our peace of mind. Wouldn't it be more useful to focus on how to reverse these situations and, therefore, think differently about it?

To achieve this, it can help us to write or talk to a specialist about these thoughts, how they have made us feel and what we have done at that time.

Reality Scan

At this point, at the moment of feeling sadness, anger, anxiety, anger or worry, it is useful to explore the thoughts that invade our mind, what we say to ourselves. Just because we think one way doesn't mean we have to continue to think that way.

For example, we could assess whether:

- What we think has to do with reality. In this sense, it can be positive to try to:
 - * Write what you think causes you discomfort.
 - * Reasons why those thoughts are true or not.
 - * Reasons why you think those thoughts are beneficial.
 - * What reasons can exist to finally determine if those thoughts are true or beneficial, or not?

Recount the trauma

In this guide, basic and general aspects have been referred to on how to manage trauma from different mechanisms through which to deal with thoughts and problems. All of these aspects can positively contribute to our well-being from the moment we begin to think and talk about the trauma experienced, deciding how to share what happened. During this communication, especially with a therapist, we can learn to manage our feelings. The intervention of a specialist is crucial, because to



the extent that we narrate the traumatic events, we may feel anxiety or any other emotion, and a therapist can help control it. However, the ones who have the greatest responsibility in this are ourselves.

Self-care

While we participate in therapy to overcome any trauma, it is essential to know how to take good care of ourselves. Possibly during that narrative stage of the traumatic event, we feel good, or perhaps we perceive those memories related to it, dreams, or we feel very tired continue to recur. This is normal, although it is also considered a sign of progress in therapy. Even so, it is useful to continue working on acquired trauma management skills such as managing feelings, returning

to reality, gaining awareness, paying attention to thoughts, etc.

Thoughts and feelings about the trauma

As discussed above, our trauma-related thoughts disturb our feelings and the way we act.

Frequently, many people tend to have certain thoughts after experiencing a traumatic event, however, talking especially with a trusted person or with a therapist about certain associated aspects can contribute very favorably to improvement. So, let's think about how we would feel if we shared these traumatic experiences.

Support system

There are many people around us who care about us. Going to these in case you need help or just talk is very important. Perhaps by the time you read this you can draw a representation of yourself on a piece of paper and around it the names of the people you would go to or who you consider to be in your support network and with whom you feel safe, and what type of support you consider that each of them can give you or what kind of difficulties can help you solve. We must always remember that we are not completely alone, and no matter how difficult it may seem, there is always someone who can support us.

