

Do you feel emotionally wrecked by 2020?



While it goes without saying that we are living through unprecedented times, finding the right words to express our thoughts and emotions can be very difficult, especially in a professional setting. To be experiencing multiple traumas at the same time is extremely stressful and can, understandably, leave many people feeling scared of what their futures may hold or out of control of their own lives. It is of the utmost importance to start conversations and use the power of language to communicate your experiences, expand your understanding of how this is affecting yourself and others, and find a common sense of meaning.

What is Trauma?

Individual Trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring condition, during which an individual's coping capacity and/or ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed causing significant distress.

Collective Trauma is cultural, historical, insidious and political/economic trauma that impacts individuals and communities across generations.

Trauma changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think.

Trauma and the Brain

The most important job of the brain is to ensure survival, even under the most miserable conditions. Our brains are built from the bottom up starting with the emotional part. When an we experience trauma, this part of the brain reacts first—well before the rational part.

The emotional brain can be activated not only by trauma itself, but by the stimuli that trigger traumatic memories—a smell or a sound, for example. When we are faced with traumatic event or traumatic memories occur, the emotional parts of our brains protect us by overtaking the rational parts of our brains.



Listening and Mirror Neurons

We have mirror neurons in our brains, which are critical for understanding trauma and our ability to “feel into” others who are suffering. Think of mirror neurons as “neural wifi” – we pick up on not only others movements but also their emotions.



3 Stages of Trauma Recovery:

1

Safety and Stabilization: Regaining a sense of safety in own bodies and relationships with others.

2

Remembrance and Mourning: Processing the trauma, putting words and emotions to it and making meaning of it.

3

Reconnection and Integration: Creating a new sense of self and a new future involving redefining oneself in the context of meaningful relationships.

We have the ability to regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain, through such basic activities as breathing, moving and touching.

Check your Temperature

Just as checking your physical temperature is a way to assess yourself for symptoms of COVID-19, checking your emotional and mental temperature is a way to see how much racial trauma has affected you.

Here are some things to consider as you “check your temperature”:

- ▶ **Physical:** muscles, aches, pain, fatigue
- ▶ **Emotional:** Anger, Sadness, Fear
- ▶ **Mental:** Anxiety, Depression, Ruminating Thoughts

It begins with a self-check.

- ▶ **Stop:** Closing your eyes can be helpful to allow you to focus or, if you'd rather, you can always lower and half-close your eyes.
- ▶ **Breathe:** Bring awareness to the body breathing in and out. Count to five and slowly count backwards to one.
- ▶ **Scan:** When you are ready (no rush), intentionally breathe in, and move your attention to whatever part of your mind or body you want to investigate.
- ▶ **Identify:** What are you feeling emotionally, physically, or mentally. Identifying the pain point allows room for recovery. Note: having a picture of the feelings wheel handy during this time would be helpful.
- ▶ **Accept:** Your willingness and ability to accept the emotional, mental or physical experience assists in the ability to acknowledge, absorb and lose its destructive power.

The ABC's of Self-care following Trauma or violence:

Awareness

A

- ▶ Be aware of your emotions and behavioral reactions to trauma. Remind yourself that stress reactions after disaster are common. Most reactions fade with time. If they don't, reach out to the EAP for assistance.
- ▶ Recognize that you may be dealing with many forms of loss, such as loss of expectations for the future or beliefs about your safety. Journaling your thoughts and feelings may help. Creative activities exercise can provide comfort.
- ▶ Give yourself thoughts a break from thinking about what has happened and what might happen next. Try to concentrate on the positive aspects of your life. A gratitude journal can help provide hope and contentment.

Balance

B

- ▶ Find balance between work and play. Set up a specific area or room for work. Close the door at the end of the day and focus on time with family and friends.
- ▶ Take time to take care of yourself as well as others. Get enough sleep to feel well rested. Going to bed and getting up at consistent times is beneficial. Eat well-balanced meals at consistent times. Exercise daily to reduce stress. Nurture yourself with calming activities like deep breathing, meditation, or progressive relaxation. Intentionally relax and schedule quiet time for reflection.
- ▶ Structure your time. Choose activities that engage your mind and body and keep you in the present. Set short-term goals to stay on track.

- C**
- ▶ Spend time with or help others. Traumatic events are unique in that many people are affected. Connecting with family and friends may help you realize you are not the only one affected. This gives you a chance to provide support.. Providing support lifts your mood and makes you feel less alone.
 - ▶ Take a time out if you're feeling angry. The stress following trauma or violence can create irritability and anger. This anger can affect your health, sense of self-control, and relationships. Take a break to calm down when you experience anger. This may help you preserve your health and relationships.
 - ▶ Get your facts about the trauma or violent protests from a reliable, objective source. Don't rely on rumors or guesswork. Limit your intake of media related to the crisis. Overexposure only increases stress.

The period following trauma or violence can be very stressful for survivors and others who may be involved. Taking steps to manage stress and cope with the fear can help resolve some of the challenges. Some steps focus on support from others and helping others. Other strategies involve problem-solving skills and shifting your thoughts or outlook. If the stress reaction persists, the EAP is available to provide support.