

What is The Cognitive Impact of Trauma?

What is Trauma?

A trauma is a deeply distressing and disturbing experience. They are often defined as “experiences which are life threatening or pose a significant threat to a person’s physical or psychological wellbeing.”[1]

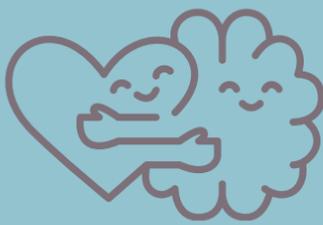
Examples of potential events include:

- Sexual and/or physical abuse.
- Sudden unexpected or violent death of someone close (e.g. accident, suicide).
- Natural disaster (e.g. earthquake, flood, bushfire).
- Involvement in a serious car accident.
- War or political violence (e.g. terrorism, becoming a refugee, civil war).

A person’s available support following a trauma, past life experiences, physical health, mental health and coping skills can all influence how they respond to such an event.[2]

How does Trauma Impact The Brain?

The symptoms of trauma can present in many different ways. These can be short and long term, and can be grouped into four main categories; cognitive (thinking), behavioural (things we do), physical and emotional.[3]



Physical

- Excessive alertness, on the look-out for signs of danger
- Easily startled
- Fatigue/exhaustion
- Disturbed sleep
- General aches and pains



Cognitive

- Intrusive thoughts and memories of the event
- Visual images of the event
- Nightmares
- Poor concentration and memory
- Disorientation
- Confusion



Emotional

- Fear
- Numbness and detachment
- Depression
- Guilt
- Anger and irritability
- Anxiety and panic



Behavioral

- Avoidance of places or activities that are reminders of the event
- Social withdrawal and isolations
- Loss of interest in normal activities

The Australian Psychological Society Limited (2018). Trauma. Retrieved from <https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Trauma>

[2] Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, (2013). Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Acute Stress Disorder & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Retrieved from <https://phoenixaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Phoenix-ASD-PTSD-Guidelines.pdf>

[3] APS (2018)



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