

TRAUMA

Trauma can be seen as an all purpose word for what happens when your world is turned upside down. In the field of mental health "trauma" refers to an experience (single event or ongoing experience) that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects.

Trauma can result from adverse childhood experiences:

- physical abuse and injury,
- emotional abuse and neglect,
- sexual abuse and/or exploitation,
- growing up with significant family dysfunction/discord.

As well, witnessing or surviving severe family/community events as a child or an adult including:

- accidents,
- natural or human-caused disasters,
- armed conflicts,
- political terror, torture
- being a victim of violent crime, rape or sexual assault,
- experiencing or being exposed to domestic violence can all lead to traumatic impacts.

The many long term physical and mental health consequences of traumatic experiences put survivors at serious risk for chronic disease.

A person who has been traumatized may experience some or all of the following:

Physical Disturbances:

- Body memories or flashbacks of the traumatic events
- Unexplained physical complaints which have no medical cause
- Sleep problems, nightmares
- Exhaustion

Relationship Difficulties:

- Trust issues
- Problems in sexual intimacy
- Not being able to give and take in a relationship
- Repeatedly looking to be rescued
- Fearful of being close to others
- Lack of awareness of dangerous situations
- Isolating and withdrawing from social contact

Problems with Thinking and Feeling:

- Feeling too much or too little
- Repetitive thoughts
- Depression, pervasive sadness

- Problems with concentration
- Hopelessness, helplessness
- Confused thinking
- Anxiety, panic attacks
- Poor memory
- Shame, sense of worthlessness or badness
- Judgmental, critical thoughts
- Rage or anger that seems out of proportion

Injurious Behaviours

- Eating issues, bingeing, starving oneself
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Sexual addiction
- Gambling
- Self harming
- Abusing others

Unresolved, trauma can perpetuate itself across generations, in families and communities. In order to end the cycle it is vital to address what has happened. For many people who are receiving mental health or addiction services trauma may be an important underlying factor.

The impacts of trauma can arise in different ways throughout one's life. Sometimes people forget the traumatic events that happen to them and remember them at a later time when something reminds them. However trauma is impacting a person, trauma therapy can support managing and attending to these impacts.

Since many traumas occur in the context of relationships, we believe healing also occurs in relationships. In our trauma programs for partner abuse and adult survivors of childhood abuse careful attention is paid to the development of relationship with the therapist, the survivor's support system and their community. Conversations about the role of religion or spirituality in healing are welcomed.

Trauma services at CFSPD are guided by the following principles:

- Compassion, respect and dignity. All individuals, couples and families have the right to be treated with compassion, respect and dignity.
- Safety. The safety of our clients is paramount. Increasing the safety of trauma survivors enhances quality of life including relationships with others.
- Complexity. Holding multiple perspectives on trauma will enable us to attend to the complex ways trauma disrupts people's lives. This analysis may include the influence of poverty, trauma's impact on learning and attention, oppression, marginalization, nature of relationship to the perpetrator, community support etc.
- Diversity. We are committed to developing culturally relevant services that honour and are responsive to the diverse range of client experiences, impacts and needs.
- Pervasiveness. Unfortunately, no one is immune from experiencing trauma. We recognize that trauma, violence and abuse can affect men, women and children and that it can cross all socioeconomic, cultural, racial and community barriers.