
UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA?

It is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that can shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless or vulnerable. Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm.

The recent attacks in Christchurch are examples of these experiences.

A stressful event is most likely to be traumatic if:

- It happened unexpectedly.
- You were unprepared for it.
- You felt powerless to prevent it.
- It happened repeatedly.

SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Following a traumatic event, most people experience a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. These are normal reactions to abnormal events. The symptoms may last for days, weeks, or sometimes months after the trauma ended. They will gradually fade as you process (talk about/make sense of) the events and experiences.

Emotional symptoms of trauma:

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb

Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

Another part of experiencing a traumatic event is the loss of a sense of safety and security. The natural reaction to this loss is grief. Like people who have lost a loved one, people who have experienced a trauma go through a grieving process. This process can be distressing but is made easier if you turn to others for support, take care of yourself, and talk about how you feel.