

Our Collective Experience of Trauma

The Global Pandemic of COVID-19

Our collective memory, experience and humanity is all being impacted by this Global Pandemic.



The current Global Pandemic has impacted us all in different ways. For some the worst of it is working from home... for others it has been the death of loved ones, critical illness, or loss of life savings.

Many of us remember the images of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks that flash into our minds when mention of the terror attack or memorials arise. The billowing smoke, the calamity, the images of death and destruction. The acts of terror but also heroism. The event changed the western world.

Although less sudden in some ways, the current global pandemic we are now in is more vast and far reaching than anything we have experienced on a global scale since the World Wars. It has changed and will continue to change our communities, lives, and society... potentially forever. What we are currently experiencing can be classified as a community, national and international Collective Trauma.



What is Trauma?

A broad definition of Trauma is to experience an event that threatens your life, or that of someone you love/care for. It can include fear of death or major injury or witnessing that of others. It can also result from repeated exposure to witnessing the death or harm of others related to a particular or ongoing series of traumatic experiences and events.

Symptoms people experience the most include:

- intense emotion like horror, grief, fear, guilt, or anger
- distressing and intrusive memories or dreams of the experience or event
- extreme distress in response to reminders of the event
- flashback memories of the event, including a disconnect from the present moment
- physical symptoms like: interrupted sleep / insomnia, heightened startle response, racing heart and anxiety/panic attacks
- cognitive impacts like poor concentration, inability to focus or difficulty learning new things

Why do I need to know about Trauma?



Being Trauma Informed and Trauma Sensitive will be a resilience factor in our collective recovery. Recognizing when you yourself, your family members, work colleagues or others may be having a trauma reaction can bolster and provide support as we all cope, heal and repair emotionally from this pandemic. If you recognize yourself or a loved one with these symptoms remember to:

- Be gentle and provide a safe emotional environment for sharing their experience and memories
- Don't make assumptions and try not to judge others' emotional outbursts, poor performance or functioning, confusing behaviours or lash outs. We are all undergoing collective stress and anxiety.
- Recognize that all our reactions and experiences are different. Some may be experiencing a pandemic vacation, while others are experiencing pandemic panic, grief, or intense trauma
- Validate and don't minimize others' experiences, even if they don't seem as "big" as yours or others. All experiences and impacts are equally important to acknowledge, regardless of where on a tragedy scale they fall
- Provide time to process and talk about this experience. Be emotionally available and recognize that talking about the pandemic may be another person's way of processing this experience
- Learn some calming strategies that you can share with others. For example, you may say "I know for me when I feel overwhelmed, I take some calming deep breaths and that helps. I know this is a hard time for everyone so if you need a moment that's OK."
- Reach out to trained mental health specialists if you need to. Know what is available and readily share this information, normalizing others' use of these services if you can. Acknowledge the courage and strength it takes to reach out for help.



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