

A Moment to Mind Yourself

Understanding Trauma and PTSD

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There are a lot of misconceptions about trauma and PTSD that will be addressed in this article. What is the difference between experiencing stress, trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

We all experience stress in life and indeed most of us will experience trauma at some point too. You can think of stress, trauma and PTSD as a range of challenging experiences that affect us psychologically, physically and even spiritually. While stressful situations can feel difficult at the time, we can usually recover from them more quickly than a traumatic event.

Traumatic experiences are more distressing or disturbing and can have lasting impacts on a person's mental and emotional health. In the past trauma used to be associated with experiencing a life-threatening event but we now know that they also can include experiencing or witnessing events such as accidents, bereavement, abuse or violence. Trauma is also subjective: what's traumatizing to one person may not have the same effect on another and not all people who experience trauma develop PTSD.

PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by a traumatic event, characterized by severe anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, and recurring thoughts about the incident. Up until recently, PTSD has been associated with military personnel returning from war. We now know that anyone exposed to trauma can develop PTSD, but various factors can influence the likelihood of developing this condition. These include the type of trauma, when it occurred (children are

more vulnerable to adverse effects), individual resilience, and available support.

The symptoms of PTSD are typically grouped into 4 types:

Intrusive Memories: These include recurring unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event, flashbacks, and nightmares.

Avoidance: People suffering from PTSD might try to avoid places, activities, or people that remind them of the traumatic event. They may avoid discussing the event or their feelings about it.

Negative Changes in Thinking and Mood: PTSD can cause negative thoughts about oneself or others, feelings of hopelessness, emotional numbness, or memory problems, including difficulty remembering important aspects of the traumatic event. **Changes in Physical and Emotional Reactions:** These include being easily startled or frightened, self-destructive behavior, trouble sleeping, irritability, and overwhelming guilt or shame.

PTSD can go beyond mental distress and impact relationships, work and physical health. Treatment for PTSD involves various strategies aimed at easing symptoms and improving functioning. Psychotherapy, particularly Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), is highly effective. CBT helps individuals process their experiences, deal with problematic thinking patterns, and develop skills to manage their symptoms. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is another therapeutic approach specifically designed to reduce the distress associated with traumatic memories.

Medications, such as antidepressants, can also be helpful in managing symptoms of PTSD such as depression, anxiety and insomnia. Support from family and friends is vital in the recovery process, as they can provide necessary encouragement and understanding. Education about PTSD can help loved ones in being supportive in a positive way.

If you or a loved one are interested getting support around trauma or PTSD, please reach to Gina or Danielle at the Irish Pastoral Centre:
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