

Many women and girls who access services at YWCAs, have experienced trauma in their lives

We need to understand trauma in order to work in a way that makes their experience as safe, collaborative and helpful as possible.

This does not mean we treat trauma, but instead we offer services in a way that is informed by trauma, thus supports strengths and basic skills for wellness and healing.

DEVELOPING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF TRAUMA

Defining Trauma

Trauma is a response to experience(s) that are overwhelming; significantly compromising our sense of safety.

The experience of trauma is unexpected, and beyond our ability to stop

Disrupts our world view/understanding of the world as safe, and/or predictable, and disrupts cognitive and emotional regulation and/or functioning; forces changes in the ways in which we cope

Therefore – it is not *necessarily* the event itself that is traumatic, but rather the impact of the event on our sense of safety, and of ourselves.



A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN



TIDE Trauma
Informed
Development
Education



Why do we need to understand trauma?

It is important to understand the effects of trauma and the links to other challenges that women and girls face, so that we can work in a way that:

- honours what has happened in women's lives
- does not add to their burdens, by retraumatizing
- notices how women are coping, their strength and resilience
- helps women and girls build further positive skills for coping or healing



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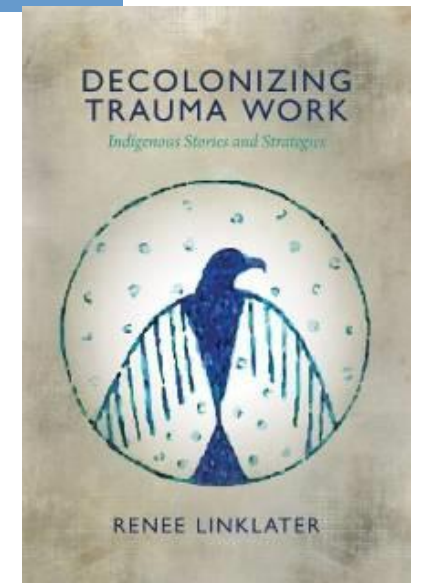


Types of Trauma

<p>Complex trauma: the effects of trauma experiences that happen multiple times; over time (eg/ ongoing abuse, domestic violence, war)</p>	<p>Single incident trauma – the effects of a trauma experience such as a natural disaster, an accident, or a sudden unexpected loss</p>
<p>Developmental trauma: the effects of exposure to trauma as infants, children or youth. Includes neglect, abandonment, abuse, witnessing violence or death, and/or coercion or betrayal. This interferes with healthy attachment and development.</p>	<p>Intergenerational trauma: effects that can be experienced by people who live with trauma survivors. Coping patterns developed in response to trauma can be passed on from one generation to the next</p>

Group and historical trauma

A trauma informed practice needs inclusion of how
colonization worked cumulatively to create complex trauma.
Renee Linklater

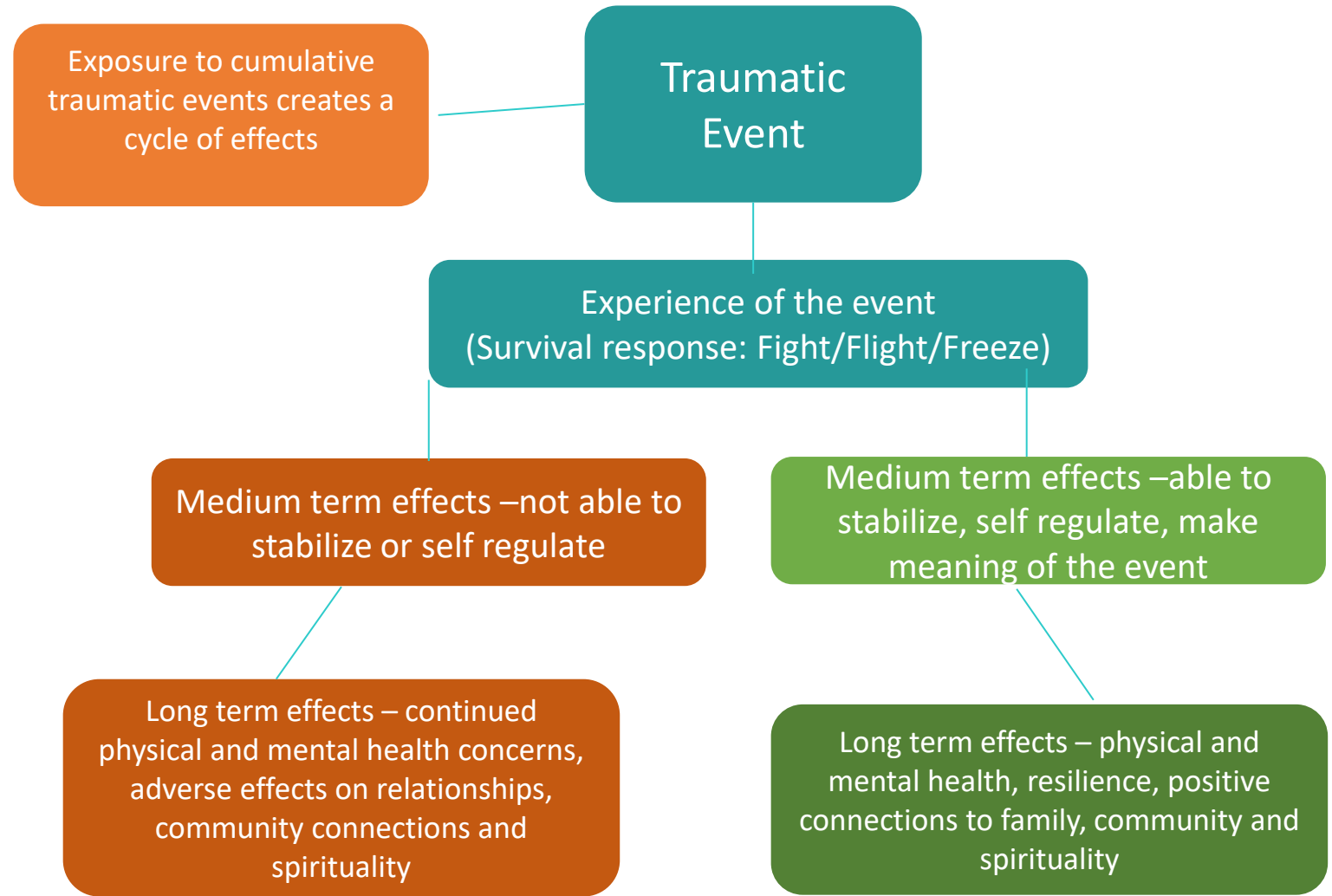


Understanding trauma

Trauma has been described by experts in the US as involving 3 Es

- Event(s)
- Experience of the event(s)
- Effect(s) over time

A trauma informed response system can mean that long negative effects are avoided.



Long term effects may be large or small, may lessen or worsen over time, and will vary for different individuals

Trauma and PTSD

“Trauma is not limited to suffering violence; it includes witnessing violence as well as stigmatization because of gender, race, poverty, incarceration, or sexual orientation.

The terms violence, trauma, abuse, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often are used interchangeably.

- *One way to clarify these terms is to think of trauma as a response to violence or some other overwhelmingly negative experience (e.g., abuse).*
- *PTSD is one type of disorder that results from trauma”*

Dr. Stephanie Covington

Responses to trauma

Biological responses

- Release of stress hormone cortisol
- In the moment, biological responses might look like crying, tight muscles, shallow breathing, heart pounding, feeling numb, feeling agitated . . .
- Long-term activation of the nervous system can lead to poor health outcomes

Psychological responses

- When the limbic system (emotional centre of the brain) is engaged, the “thinking brain” is less accessible, leading to difficulties with learning, memory, and reasoning
- Impacts can include intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks

Social responses

- Difficulty navigating relationships with others
- Isolation and avoiding people, conversations, situations, places, objects and feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations
- Reactivity, heightened emotional responses

Spiritual responses

- Compromised sense of self – low self-esteem/concept of self-worth
- Loss of sense of purpose, loss of hope
- Loss of connection to self and others
- Loss of faith/beliefs; changes in core values
- Persistent guilt, anger, and/or fear

sleep problems
 chronic pain
chest pain asthma
 autoimmune disorders heart palpitations
 jumpiness
BODY
 breathing problems pelvic pain
 tension headaches
 digestive problems
 chronic fatigue

numb feeling
depression disconnected
 alcohol and drug use **hopelessness**
shame loss of interest in life
guilt **HEART** lack of
 loss of sadness fear trust
 faith loss of meaning
self-hate irritability
isolation
 self-blame
 grief

nightmares
dissociation anger
 flashbacks avoiding certain places,
 hypervigilance people, situations
 overwhelmed **MIND** difficulty
 feeling out of control concentrating
 difficulty enjoying time memory problems
 with family and friends **nervous**
mood swings **suicidal thoughts**
 feeling distracted **anxiety**
 loss of time

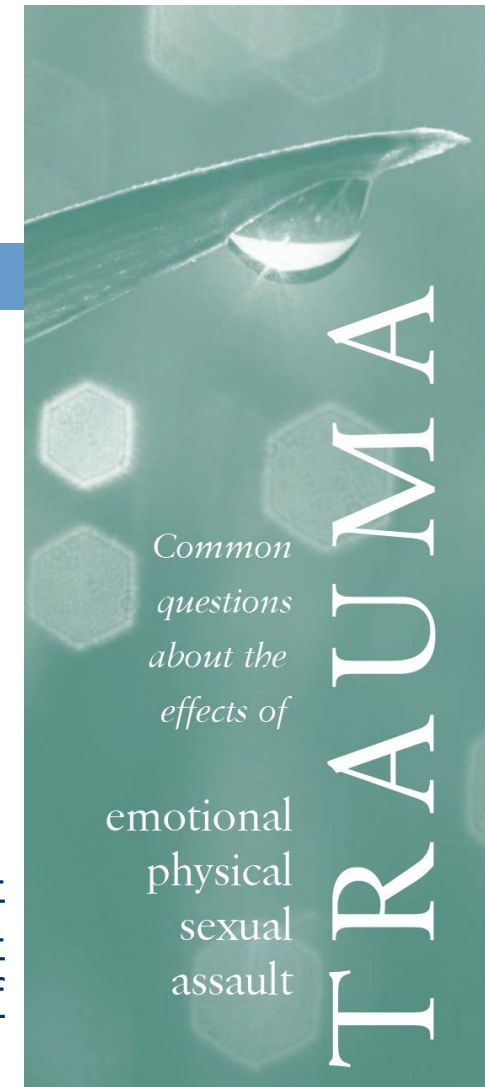
This visual representation of the effects of trauma is captured on a poster that can be downloaded from <http://bccewh.bc.ca/category/post/trauma-violence-mental-health/>

Common questions about the effects of trauma

A plain language description can be found on the website of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. It says for instance, trauma:

- can affect the way you feel (too much or too little emotion)
- can affect your ability to have satisfying relationships with others
- can affect your body
- can affect the way you think
- can affect the way you behave

<https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/guides-and-publications/trauma.pdf>



Trauma Impacts

The degree of impact is dependant upon:

- Severity
- Frequency
- Duration
- Personal (intentional) vs External (environmental)
- Responsiveness from others



Impact on service access



Trauma affects service access and engagement:

- Difficulty with trust and relationships
- Reluctance to engage, and quick to drop out
- Hyper-vigilance and suspicion

Re-traumatization

A situation, attitude, interaction or environment that replicates the events or dynamics of the original trauma and triggers the overwhelming feelings and reactions associated with them

- Can be obvious or not so obvious
- It is usually unintentional
- It is always harmful – often exacerbating the very symptoms that people are seeking help for

What can cause re-traumatization?

- Being unaware of how a person's traumatic history may affect her life
- Using practices that isolate, instead of listening and supporting connection
- Using a confrontational approach in interactions
- Being overly authoritative, not allowing opportunity for choice or collaboration in plans
- Challenging or discounting reports of abuse or other traumatic events
- Allowing the abusive behavior of one client toward another to continue without intervention

For more info see

Recognizing in the Moment
Trauma Responses sheet – [add link to YWCA website](#)



Recognizing and Attending to IN-THE-MOMENT TRAUMA RESPONSES

“Fight or Flight” or “Freeze”

Our brains and bodies often respond with a “Fight or Flight” or “Freeze” response when we feel threatened. This can include feeling stuck or trapped, being harmed (physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually), being ignored or not taken seriously, being treated unfairly, or reminded of previous harm.



If we are experiencing a fight/flight response, we might:

- Feel anxious or overwhelmed
- Feel angry, and want to yell or fight
- Have obsessive thoughts that we can't “turn off”
- Have a hard time concentrating
- Have trouble finding the right words
- Be over-reactive to what is happening around us

If we are experiencing a freeze response, we might:

- Feel zoned-out or numb
- Feel unmotivated
- Have a hard time remembering things
- Seem emotionless
- Feel disconnected from ourselves
- Dissociate

What helps us return to our Window of Tolerance?

Fight/Flight

- To feel calmer again, we can:
- Move our body to let out excess energy
 - Go for a walk/run,
 - Do push ups against a wall
 - Dance/“shake it out”
 - Squeeze stress ball
 - Take deep breaths, focusing on a long exhale
 - Name our fears, concerns, and frustrations
 - Remove ourselves from the situation

Freeze

- To feel calmer again, we can:
- Press our hands on to our arms, legs, hands
 - Count to 20 and then back down again
 - Describe the things around you: What colours can you see? What shapes? What do you see that looks soft? Hard?
 - Drink a cool glass of water
 - Take deep breaths, focusing on long exhale
 - Colour/paint a picture
 - Smell pleasing smells (essential oils or spices like cinnamon)