

Thriving after Trauma

Extremely painful physical and/or psychological experiences are traumatic (e.g. the loss of loved ones, any form of abuse, ailments caused by injury or disease, war time events, robberies, terrorist attacks etc). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the clinical term for the psychological effects of trauma which includes the following: insomnia, ‘flashbacks’ of the traumatic event(s), depression, rage, panic attacks, headaches and isolation – these symptoms may not manifest for many months or years after the occurrence(s) depending on how ready you are to deal with it.

The suggestions outlined in this article will help you thrive when these symptoms surface. It is important to remember that the survival part of trauma occurs when you are living through the harrowing incident(s) – the psychological aftereffects are a sign that it is now time to heal and slowly move forward with your life.

1/Speak to Someone

Talk to a wise, compassionate and non-judgmental person – this can be a friend, a family member, a religious/spiritual advisor or a therapist. When it comes to choosing a therapist make sure s/he is qualified, honest about her/his expertise (i.e. Does s/he specialize in trauma or grief counseling?) and that you are compatible (i.e. Can you work together as a team, in partnership?). You do need to keep talking to whomever you trust for as long as is necessary. Avoid anyone who says “get over it” and keep searching for appropriate ongoing support. Self-help groups are useful as long as the focus is on keeping the participants inspired and uplifted especially after they have purged their pain.

2/Self-care

PTSD is a distressing time which will interfere with every area of your life (sleep, diet, social life, work etc). The natural remedies listed below will help with some of these things as will the following: try resting during the day if you cannot sleep through the night; eat small healthful meals or snacks if you lack (or have too much of) an appetite as well as reducing alcohol and caffeine consumption; have as much fun as possible (e.g. movies, theme parks, concerts – whatever is ‘fun’ for you); if work is too difficult take some time off or resign (this is not an easy thing to do especially if you have major financial responsibilities – for some, work is a life saver: your choice will be based on the severity of the trauma you have endured); give yourself anything else you need (e.g. personal time and space, a holiday etc).

3/Natural Remedies

The physical and psychological symptoms of PTSD are a very mixed bag – they are also related to the effects of grief as trauma and loss usually go hand-in-hand. Below is a list of these symptoms divided into categories along with the appropriate aromatherapy oils to help you cope.

Mental: *Shock (including disbelief and numbness):* peppermint, arnica; *Confusion/poor concentration:* lemon, basil, rosemary.

Emotional: *Sadness/sorrow:* rose, chamomile; *Anger:* chamomile, rose, ylang ylang; *Guilt:* geranium, sandalwood, neroli; *Fear/Anxiety:* sandalwood, frankincense, geranium, lavender; *Depression:* bergamot, clary sage, geranium.

Physical: *Fatigue:* peppermint, basil, lemongrass; *Insomnia:* lavender, chamomile; *Loss of appetite, indigestion, heartburn:* peppermint, lavender, chamomile; *Headaches:* lavender.

Behavioral: *Isolation, withdrawal:* jasmine, frankincense, sandalwood.

The following Bach flower essences are also helpful: Rescue Remedy for shock, panic attacks and ‘flashbacks’; Star of Bethlehem for grief; White Chestnut for insomnia.

4/Creative Outlets

Your creative pursuits will help you in two ways: firstly, they allow healthy expression of your negative emotions and thoughts and secondly, they keep you connected to your Self – your core, your power, your essence – and this will strengthen you. Do you love to write, paint, cook, build, sculpt or compose? What do you enjoy doing so much that it never feels like work, only bliss?

5/Faith and Meaning

These two concepts are interrelated – they reflect the need to have Faith in something/one in order to give your life Meaning. This is important as it keeps you going during the inevitable almost-impossible-to-bear-pain – it is as important as wearing a life preserver when lost at sea. For some of you, Faith is about believing in God (or a Higher Power) and/or yourself. Faith, however, does not have to be spiritual/religious but it does need to give you a sense of peace and the understanding that everything happens for a reason. Here are some alternative examples of finding Faith and Meaning in your life: a belief that painful experiences are meant to teach profound life lessons which will allow you to evolve; your purpose is to help those who have undergone the same agony; your loved ones are so important that you want to be a positive influence in their lives, or, all of the above.

Happy Healing!

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