



What is Trauma?

Trauma is characterized by feelings of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation. Traumatic events often produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. Traumatic reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations.

Trauma and the Brain

The experience of trauma changes the structure of the brain. Pathways in the brain can be disrupted by exposure to trauma, which causes some trauma survivors' brain to be altered forever. When the experience of trauma is chronic, the brain continually responds as if it is under stress; by preparing the body for fight, flight, or freeze, even though, the actual traumatic event has ended.

Fight: The person fights back in the face of a traumatic event. Fighting back may take the form of physical or verbal resistance.

Flight: In the face of trauma, the person's reaction is to flee the situation. The body mobilizes to leave the traumatic experience.

Freeze: The traumatic response involves shutting down of physical reaction to the traumatic event.

Survivors might feel shocked or ashamed at their reaction to a traumatic event. Some survivors might blame themselves if they "froze" during the traumatic event. However, it is important to understand that survivors do not consciously choose their fight, flight, or freeze response.

What you may be feeling...

Shock and Numbness: You may feel overwhelmed and confused.

Loss of Control/Helpless: You may feel as though your whole life has been turned upside down. Your thoughts and feelings may seem out of control.

Fear: You may be afraid of being hurt again, fear of being alone, or fear that other people and/or certain situations may remind you of the trauma.

Self-Blame/Shame: You may feel like you could have done something to prevent the incident.

Vulnerability/Distrust: You may feel like you are at the mercy of your emotions or the actions of others. You may also feel like you can't trust others, including yourself.

Anger: You may be angry with the person that caused you hurt. You may be angry at the world since you no longer feel safe.

Disruption of Activities: You may feel preoccupied with intrusive thoughts about the incident. You may experience difficulty concentrating, nightmares, have a change in appetite, and/or experience anxiety and depression.

Child & Family Services of Saginaw

the counseling center • employee wellness center • sexual assault center

2838 Automotive Centre Rd, Saginaw, MI 48603 • 989.790.7500

www.childandfamilysaginaw.org