

The Sky before the Storm

**WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT
TRAUMA**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the following:

To the Wider Circle who started it all. To Anne and Louisa for working with me. To the REAL programme's students whose desire to learn inspired. For the reprint of this publication thank you to The Victims Unit. To Michael who modelled how to keep things simple! Thanks to Pat, (first edition), Martina (second and third edition).

I am especially grateful to Marcus Patton and Dermot Cavanagh for their artistic contribution. They brought beauty to a serious topic.

E. Mc Creave

June 2004

Special Note for this version.

This version of Sky Before The Storm has space for you to add your own images that are relevant to your group and region. We encourage you to use beautiful images that are calming and soothing and that will not trigger memories.

If you have any queries regarding image usage, please visit www.widercircle.org to get in contact.

Third Edition

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book about **TRAUMA**.

You might find it useful if you've had a bad shock.

Before reading it, keep in mind the following:

- Stay in control of what you read. Control is more important than knowledge.
- This means that if you feel 'low' or scared by what you read, it would be wise to stop for awhile. Only read when you're calm again.
- The book is actually very ordinary. But how you read it is important.
- Take it slow and easy.
- Don't be surprised if you have to read it several times. You might find it interesting, but not easy to remember.
- If it helps you, be careful about showing it to others. Don't get all excited and rush out to make them read it. You might put them back into shock!
- If you get bothered when reading, look at the pictures. They may help calm you.
- Feel free to photocopy *the text* - but only if you are helping others. (The artwork is under copyright and can't be copied. So make your own pictures!)

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KEY TERMS

What you will learn in this section.

You will learn what trauma is. This will be defined and explained.

You will learn about the following:

- *terror*
- *the instinct to survive and anger*
- *being alone and helpless, the heart of trauma*
- *how to soothe and protect.*

DEFINITIONS

Post means ‘after’

Trauma means ‘a shock’

Stress is:

- The response of your body to any demands made upon it.
- Your inner response to pressure coming from outside.
- The anger that appears in your body when faced with a threat.

Post Trauma Stress is:

- The stress that appears in your body after a shock.
- The stress that appears after the bonds which attach you to others are cut - but not by you.

Post Trauma Stress Disorder: After a severe shock, you are said to be in a ‘very stressed condition’.

Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD) means:

- The stressful way you are after a severe shock.
- The stressful condition you are in after a severe shock.

This condition is viewed as normal; it normally can be expected to appear in anyone who has been exposed to something that is not normal.

It may be normal, but it is also a medical condition. Only a doctor can tell if you are in this condition or not.

However, IT IS NOT A MENTAL ILLNESS. It is important to know this.

WHAT THE TERMS MEAN

Given that trauma involves the cutting of bonds, it can be useful to take a closer look at these.

1. BONDS

In the womb, a baby is attached to the mother by an umbilical cord.

After birth, each of us becomes attached to others by 'bonds'; we become attached to our family by blood bonds.

Outside of the family we become attached to others by social bonds. By being connected to others we are safer as the group has more power than the individual.

Bonds which attach *create safety*. It is important to keep this in mind (since most of us associate attachment with love rather than with security).

2. THE BREAKING OF ATTACHMENT BONDS

Any time the invisible bond that links you to a home, family or society is cut, you are said to be shocked or traumatised.

The degree of shock differs from person to person. Much depends on:

- the degree of attachment; the greater the attachment, the greater the shock
- the age of the person; the younger the person, the more severe the shock
- the intensity of the event; the greater the trauma is if you are:
 - physically close to the event or
 - emotionally close (e.g. attacked by a friend rather than a stranger.)

The result is that you no longer feel *safe* in this world. Nobody feels safe when they are alone and helpless. In turn, being alone and helpless leads to *terror*.

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TERROR

Fear is your body's response to danger. The greater the danger is, the greater the fear. However, when the danger swamps you, then fear takes an extreme form known as *terror*.

Extreme fear has one strange feature; once exposed to it, your body never forgets it. You may forget what the danger was, but your body will never forget the terror. Further, the fear response now begins to run your life.

The point to remember is: *the traumatised body lives in a constant state of terror*.

This is true whether you know it or not. It is true whether you feel the terror or not.

Living in terror

Living in a constant state of terror means you are:

1. *Ruled by fear*

Most traumatised people get so used to their state of terror that they hardly even notice it! Too often they say, "I'm fine" - though some may admit to having panic attacks from time to time.

2. *Vulnerable to 'triggers'*

People may think that they are calm. However, if something appears to remind them of the original danger, their entire body may register terror.

These outside signals are known as 'triggers'. They can be anything. Examples might be a person, a colour, a sound, a smell, or an object.

The triggers can appear at any time but most often when you run into something new - such as your first holiday overseas or a new boyfriend. They can appear at important moments such as at an anniversary, marriage or retirement. At such times, you may have a panic attack and not know why.

Result

Your traumatised body becomes like a country on a continual war-footing; it is always waiting for the next attack; it is always on guard. In other words, *survival becomes more important than living*.

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THE INSTINCT TO SURVIVE

Anger is the energy behind the survival instinct. It is the energy you use to:

- protect yourself
- assert yourself

Anger is an *energy or power*. IT IS NOT A FEELING. You can, of course feel 'angry'. But anger is always in your body whether you feel it or not; like blood pressure, it merely rises or falls.

Danger or fear raises the level of anger in your system. And since the traumatised body is like a country on a war-footing, it follows that the raised level of anger gives you the energy:

- to attack the source of danger (FIGHT)
- to retreat from the source of danger (FLIGHT).

That is what happens in normal situations.

The traumatised body, however, is very different from the normal body. Instead of either attacking or retreating, it tries to do both at the same time!

To go in two different directions at the same time amounts to, 'swinging between two extremes'. You swing between two poles.

We call it ***THE PENDULUM EFFECT***.

For example, one minute you will be full of anger, then swing over to being full of terror. Then swing back to anger again.

Other examples. You will want to be in total control, and the next moment will feel completely helpless. Or you will hope for too much and then hope for too little. You will want all, you will want nothing.

This to-and-fro movement is entirely instinctive. It is a survival tactic.

To understand trauma, you have to grasp this swinging movement.

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ALONE AND HELPLESS

When you start swinging between terror and anger, you are said to be *unsettled*. What makes you feel unsettled is knowing that the world is not as safe as you once thought it was.

Think of a baby who has lost his mother. He does not feel safe because he is *alone and helpless*.

Because he is alone, he feels angry. Because he is helpless, he feels terrified.

Your body is going to feel the same way after a severe shock.

And in later life whenever you feel both alone and helpless, you will feel unsafe and unsettled once more. If so, it is important to take care of yourself.

What to do

You are liable to feel unsettled when you are by yourself (alone) with nothing to do (helpless). This often happens at weekends, holiday times and when you come to retirement. At such times you might feel a bit low.

But it can be comforting to know that you can do something about it!

To become more settled, you've got to feel safe once more. And anything you do to make yourself feel *really* safe is to be welcomed.

The best way to feel safe is:

- to join a group (to avoid being alone)
- to help others (to avoid being helpless)

For example:

- Call a friend or get involved with, say, a club (to avoid being on your own)
- Do some work - even voluntary work (to avoid feeling helpless).

Once you start *connecting* with people in this way, you will feel better. Trauma arises when the bonds that attach are cut without your permission. It follows that when you re-connect with others, you will be dealing with trauma.

SOOTHE

After a severe shock, it becomes important to soothe and protect yourself. The reason for this is as follows:

- Without soothing, you will cling to and depend on others for it.
- Without protection, you will feel terror.

SOOTHE

After a shock, your 'nerves' are all on edge. Your nerves need to be soothed. That's why counsellors are brought in immediately after a shock - to soothe.

Only much later do you go to them for counselling. Then you learn how to soothe yourself.

So important is soothing, that *its absence can be more harmful than the trauma!*

However, instead of soothing, some people start *scolding* themselves after a shock. "I should have done this" or, "I should have done that". This does not help.

Others turn to tobacco, alcohol, chocolate, sex or shopping to soothe their nerves. These don't help. You only get real soothing from *a person*, not from things.

How to soothe yourself

- Talk to a trauma counsellor.
- Listen to soft music. But play it over and over. The consistency will soothe as much as the music.
- Develop hobbies that you enjoyed as a child. For example, collecting stamps or dolls, dancing, painting etc. But be consistent.
- Look at beautiful scenes. Create beautiful things. Beauty soothes.
- Avoid horror movies or scenes of violence. Your body does not need more ugly images.

PROTECT

When you have a serious shock, you suddenly realise that you are *helpless* to do anything about it. It is outside of your control.

Complete helplessness due to loss of control creates a terror that your body will never forget.

Indeed, *the lack of control may also be more traumatic than the shock itself.*

Learned helplessness

The helplessness that you feel when shocked is due to your loss of control over things that *swamp*.

When you are swamped, you are 'taken by storm'. It is like being in a ship in the middle of a hurricane. It is like looking at death.

In this it differs from ordinary helplessness. This is what a sailor might feel when trying to sail against a strong wind. He is slowed down and is helpless to do much about it. This is a natural helplessness.

But when you are swamped or overpowered, you feel a total helplessness that is *learned*.

It is called 'learned' because you will never forget it.

Learned helplessness replaces mastery. It will:

- make you yield to addictions,
- leave you unable to make a decision,
- stay with you forever - unless you fight it.

You must protect yourself from this dangerous helplessness as well as from the outside world. Both will swamp you - if you allow this to happen.

REVIEW

Definition

Trauma arises when bonds that attach are cut without your permission.

What happens

This takes place when you are faced with an experience that threatens your life, and when you have no safe place to which you can retreat.

Feeling both alone and helpless, you become terrified.

Your terror triggers your survival instinct. This floods you with anger.

The terror drives you to run away. The anger drives you to attack. You find yourself swinging like a pendulum in two different directions. You swing between two poles.

All of the above are normal. They are normal responses to a life-threatening experience. It is the life-threatening experience that is not normal.

What to do

- To deal with being alone, seek out company.
- To deal with being helpless, help others.
- To deal with the terror, soothe yourself.
- To deal with the anger, protect yourself.

Points to remember

- Your body never forgets extreme fear.
- Your body learns how to be helpless.
- You begin to swing between two extremes.

HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS YOUR BODY:

THE MEDICAL EFFECTS

What you will learn in this section.

You will learn that trauma is a medical condition.

Further, this condition:

- *keeps you alert*
- *blinds you to danger*
- *can make you addicted*
- *makes you cling and become dependent*
- *affects how you do things*
- *affects how you remember things*
- *affects your health.*

But you can control it.

THE MEDICAL CONDITION

Post Trauma Stress Disorder is a medical condition. It is a medical condition because of the unusually high levels of chemicals that appear in your blood after a severe shock.

What this means

It is normal for your body to produce more chemicals when you are under pressure. The extra chemicals in your blood give you instant energy to deal with the pressure. Then when the pressure eases, the chemical supply goes back to normal.

However, when you get a severe shock, your body seems to have trouble knowing when the shock is over! As we said earlier, once the body experiences terror, it never forgets it. As a result, the chemical supply does not go back to normal; your body remains filled with those extra chemicals.

This is why the traumatised body is said to be different from the ordinary body.

The point to remember is that *traumatised people have an unusually high level of chemicals in their blood supply.*

What to do

First go to your doctor for help - to get your blood back to normal. Your doctor may say that you are fine. On the other hand, your doctor may treat you or send you to a psychiatrist. If so, that does not mean that you are crazy! It only means that psychiatrists are specialists who deal with chemicals. That's their job.

Only a medical person can say if you have Post Trauma Stress Disorder or not.

On the other hand, anyone who tells you, "Pull yourself together! There's nothing wrong with you! Put it behind you and get on with life!" is not helping.

After you have seen your doctor, go to a trauma counsellor or group for further assistance if you want it.

The following pages will show you what to expect from this medical condition.

ALERTNESS

Having so many chemicals in your blood leads to the following:

YOUR FEELING OF TERROR WILL KEEP YOU ALERT.

We have mentioned terror before. Now we will look at the state of *alertness*. This state is closely linked to terror. And since your body will never forget the feeling of terror, it follows that you will find yourself staying alert in case the terror comes back.

- You are said to be ‘on your guard’. You become like a soldier on guard duty, keeping watch all the time. This explains why you may have some trouble going to sleep at night; sentries are not supposed to sleep when on duty!
- You may find yourself forever checking things to make sure that you are safe. For example, you may check the windows in your house to make sure that they are locked. Then you may find yourself going back to check them again. And again!

Or when walking down the street, you may find yourself glancing behind you all the time, just ‘checking’ who is behind you.

The above, of course, are only examples. But while most people check things, your checking becomes obsessive.

- You may find yourself almost ‘jumping out of your skin’ if you are startled, say, by a sudden loud noise, or if someone behind you unexpectedly taps you on the shoulder.
- You may have trouble relaxing. For example, if you sit down to watch TV, you may find yourself getting restless; you’ve always got to be on the move. After all, a sentry has to march up and down when on duty. Stay alert!
- Finally, you will become worn out with all the checking and patrolling.

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BLIND TO DANGER

YOU CANNOT SEE DANGER.

What you are checking for is danger. But you only know danger when you feel fear.

However, your body is so used to *extreme* fear that it can hardly sense *ordinary* fear at all!

The extra chemicals in your blood numb you so that you often feel nothing. If you feel nothing, then you can't feel fear. And if you don't feel fear, then you won't sense danger until it is too late!

In short, while always *looking* for danger, you simply can't *see* it when it comes. Trauma *blinds* you to danger. And if you can't see danger, then you are in trouble.

This may explain why so many joyriders end up injured or dead; they can't see the danger in what they are doing.

It also may explain why traumatised people often end up in trouble. For example, without any weapons and without any fear, they may attack armed men and be shocked to find themselves shot. Later they may say, "I must have been crazy!" But they weren't; most likely, they had been previously traumatised.

Taking risks

In other words, you may find yourself *taking risks* that ordinary people might think twice about.

If you are a traumatised woman, you may find yourself *talking* in a risky manner. This is known as 'gossip'.

If you are a traumatised man, you may find yourself *acting* in a dangerous way, gambling excessively or 'living on the edge'. You may take chances with your own life or somebody else's. For example, you might drive far too fast.

In all cases, your sense of danger is missing due to trauma.

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ADDICTION

YOU CAN BECOME ADDICTED.

Most of the time you will feel depressed and empty.

However, since trauma floods your body with chemicals such as adrenaline which gives you a ‘buzz’ or a ‘high’, you can become *addicted to trauma*.

Examples of this addiction can be seen in movies such as: “Fearless”, “The Pawnbroker”, the Russian roulette scene in “The Deer Hunter” or the start of “Apocalypse Now”.

That’s why you often can’t stop thinking or talking about ‘what happened’ to you. *Just remembering it gives you a ‘high’*.

Later, you will swing over and feel ‘low’ because of what happened. But the lower you feel, the more you will look for the ‘high’. And so you start thinking again.

You are now becoming an *addict* without even noticing it.

Addiction

Addiction means becoming attached to something that is not good for you. It also means that you *yield* to this attachment rather than *choose* it.

As a traumatised person, you had *no choice* as to what happened to you in the first place. The shock was beyond your control.

Neither do you choose the addiction that comes after it. Your hunger for a ‘high’ comes from all those chemicals in your blood.

Now you are in danger of *yielding* to this addiction because of ‘learned helplessness’. And if you do, you will find yourself in bondage. The addiction will become your master. You will become its slave. You become a slave whenever you lose control. *You are either in control or in trouble. The choice is yours.*

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CLING AND DEPEND

YOU CLING AND DEPEND ON OTHERS.

Fixation

Nobody can be fully in control of everything. We all yield at times, say, to pleasure. But afterwards, we take control of ourselves.

A true addict, on the other hand, is never in full control. Rather he becomes stuck on that to which he is attached. He can't let it go. His whole life begins to go in a circle around that on which he is fixed.

This will happen to you after a severe shock. You keep going 'over and over' or around it in your mind. You have trouble separating yourself from the memory of it due to 'learned helplessness'. You are becoming *fixed* to it.

Once you have learned how to go around things in a circle, you can easily make this a way of living. For example, you might get stuck on drugs. These become your life.

Indeed, you can become addicted to anything. You can become stuck on politics, on religion, on shopping, on money, sex, power, alcohol or cars. You get stuck on anything that gives you a 'high'. It then becomes your life.

Clinging

Unable to let go, you will find yourself *clinging to* (like a baby) and *depending on* your fix. And too often that fix is the *story* you tell yourself about 'what happened'. You simply cannot let go of the story as it gives you a 'buzz'. Severe traumas make you chemically addicted. And the chemical addiction makes you fixated and dependent. It can also make you depressed.

What to do

To deal with your depression, see your doctor. To deal with your fixation and dependence, talk to someone trained in trauma work, not to the whole world. Both experts can be useful when you want to *take control* of yourself again.

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YOUR ACTIONS

YOU MAY OVER OR UNDER REACT.

Over react

When you meet something minor that might be ‘no big deal’ to other people, you may find yourself ‘blowing a fuse’.

For example, someone puts too much milk in your tea. And you in a fury smash the cup. Clearly, your reaction is out of all proportion to the event.

The extra milk only makes your tea a little cooler. That may be inconvenient for others; it might cause them a little irritation. But to you it becomes a disaster; it also sends you into a rage.

The reason you become so furious is that your body has a lot of *adrenaline* in it. And while this can make you feel ‘high’, it can also increase your annoyance when you become frustrated.

Your greater level of anger can lead you to react violently if you are not careful.

Under react

Severe shocks can leave you with *no interest in things that once mattered* to you.

For example, once you enjoyed partying. Now, after the shock, you find that you, “Couldn’t be bothered going”. *You feel cut off from people.*

Not only have you lost interest, but you may find that you can’t make up your mind whether to go or not. The chemicals in your blood numb your feelings to protect you from pain. But they also numb your brain. That stops you from thinking clearly. As a result, you can’t make a decision. *Trauma damages your ability to make decisions.*

For example, if someone asks you, “Are you going to the party?” you will find yourself waffling: “Maybe. I’m not sure. I’ll wait and see.”

When you can’t make up your mind, you tend to do nothing. You suffer from *learned helplessness*. And so you under react to situations.

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MEMORY

YOU REMEMBER TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE.

Remembering too much

Remembering shocking events is different from remembering ordinary things.

When you remember shocking events, you *relive* them (rather than recall them).

As you 'bring memories to life', terror is triggered. The adrenaline flows. You get another rush of chemicals into your blood *as if the trauma was happening again*. You get 'high'. But you also get very angry.

Some people even start 'acting out' the traumatic images (like a child at play).

These pictures can sometimes appear unexpectedly as *flashbacks*.

They can appear as *nightmares*.

Remembering too little

This is called *amnesia*. When you suffer from amnesia, you can't remember 'what happened'. Or you can't remember important bits of it.

This does not mean that you have forgotten. Your body never forgets. It only means that the memory file in your head (which holds the pictures) is closed. Your inability to open the file distracts you. *You become easily distracted*.

Amnesia stops you from remembering terrible things. It distracts you.

What causes the amnesia are chemicals in your blood supply. These block the signals which would open the memory file.

But later, something may happen to re-open the file. Then you can remember.

HEALTH

YOU CAN BECOME ILL.

As time passes, all those extra chemicals in your body actually *weaken* your immune system. You can easily suffer the following:

- * **Infections:** if there is a ‘bug’ going around, you are liable to catch it.
- * **Burn-out:** since you become addicted to work, you keep going till you drop. You become overly tired. This is called ‘burn-out’.

Here are some other things you might suffer:

- dizziness
- rapid heart beats and ‘the shakes’
- breathing problems
- nausea and diarrhoea
- headaches
- period problems
- sleep problems

Your health, of course, is not helped by your addiction. After a shock, you may find yourself drinking, smoking or eating more.

Nor is it helped by your *loss of interest* in activity. Instead, you can become a ‘couch potato’, addicted to TV.

That’s why a lot of people after a shock say that *they don’t expect to live too long*.

This is especially true among young people.

What to do

Take exercise and watch your diet - especially sugar and coffee. Reduce these.

REVIEW

Definition

Trauma is a medical condition. It floods your body with chemicals.

Effects

The presence of these chemicals in your blood affect:

- your feelings. YOU SWING BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW.
- your memory. YOU CAN'T FORGET OR CAN'T REMEMBER.
- your actions. YOU SWING BETWEEN TOO MUCH AND TOO LITTLE.

Consequences

- Your feeling of terror will keep you alert.
- You cannot see danger despite your alertness.
- You become addicted.
- You can become ill very easily.

Result

- *Your hopes become disturbed* due to chemicals in your blood.
 - you hope for too much when you feel 'high'.
 - you hope for too little when you feel 'low'.

What to do

See your doctor. Then go to a trauma counsellor or group.

Points to remember

Trauma is primarily a medical condition. It first affects your body. But because it does affect your body, it can then lead you to *think* and *act* in ways that others might find odd. Still, for you, these are normal.

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HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS RELATIONSHIPS

What you will learn in this section.

*You will learn how trauma affects three things
which every relationship needs if it is to work.*

These are:

- *safety*
- *trust*
- *confidence*

You will also learn that safety is the most important.

1. SAFETY

When you meet with people, the first thing you want is to feel *safe* with them. But how can you feel safe with people? After all, it was ‘people’ who attacked you in the first place. Now, even meeting innocent people makes you nervous. As a result, you don’t feel safe with anyone. Not even with yourself!

Safety is a need for most people. But for you, *it becomes a matter of life or death*. Safety is your biggest issue. If you do not feel safe, you can go back into shock.

The following will show you how to feel safe.

CREATE A SAFE BASE.

Before exploring a new relationship, make sure you have a safe base. A safe base is any place where you are in *control*. It is a place to which you can retreat if anything goes wrong.

And the first place you have to control is your own body! (That’s why you diet and exercise - to get control over your addiction).

To get control of your body:

- *slow yourself down*. For example, take slow breaths. Trauma and those extra chemicals in your blood make you *over active*. So, if you get scared, you might find your breathing gets quicker. To slow down, blow up a paper bag or balloon.

- *take it easy and take time to think before you act*. You do this because, after a shock, your *actions become impulsive* rather than thoughtful. So, slow down!

- *remember a time before the trauma when you last felt really safe*. Fix that place in your memory. And go back to it whenever you begin to feel unsafe. Make such memories your safe base.

The safe base can be anything you dwell in or dwell on. It can be any room as long as you feel in control of it. It might even be your car! *The point to remember is that you are only safe when you are in control*.

CONTROL

TAKE CONTROL OF THE WORLD ABOUT YOU.

If you don't take control, you may go out of control! This is particularly true in relationships.

Taking control means *putting order* into your world. It was the world which once attacked you. And so, for you, it is normal to think that *everybody* is out to get you! What guarantees have you that they're not?

Any change in the world about you will put your body on full alert. Any change becomes an *emergency* to you. It becomes a potential *disaster* waiting to happen.

That's why it is *not* a good idea for you to move too often from place to place. Especially new places. If they are new, you will know nothing about them. You will feel that you do not control them. And you might suffer a panic-attack.

To take control of the world about you:

- *stay where you are in places that are familiar to you.*
- *make yourself familiar with what is around you.*

For example, you might have a fear of flying. You will feel out of control since, clearly, someone else is in control - the pilot! It may not be the flying you fear but, rather, your lack of control over the plane.

It follows that you should be OK if you are the pilot rather than the passenger. You will feel safe if you are in the driving seat or in control.

But if not, then do the next best thing. *Make yourself at home* in the plane. Bring along a familiar item - such as a family photo - and put it in front of you. Or bring along your favourite rug and wrap it around your legs.

All this may make the other person in your life think that you are a 'control freak'. But you really have little choice if you want to feel safe. Think of taking control as *normal* for you.

To make it easier for the other person to understand, tell them why it is both *normal and necessary* for you to take control. Say that you have a medical condition arising from trauma. And that you have to control it.

LOOKING FOR SAFETY

USE YOUR EYES

After a shock, you get a ‘high’ by remembering. When you remember, you look at what happened using your ‘inner eye’.

When using your ‘inner eye’, you don’t use your *real* eyes (which is why many artists close their eyes when singing.)

You, of course, keep your eyes open - but don’t use them. Rather, you find yourself *staring* at one fixed point in space.

To take control, start using your eyes. Make them move in their eye-sockets.

For example, if you move into a new place, *look* at every object around you. Don’t swing your head around too much when doing so. Make your eyes swing to and fro, quickly, taking in as much as you can.

Taking in a lot of images in a hurry will make you feel in control. That is why people who make TV commercials change the image almost every second. They trigger in you the desire to control but don’t give you time to *think*.

And when you move into a new place, your memories might be triggered; you might start *thinking* about what happened to you in the past. To stop yourself from thinking too much and to take control, use your eyeballs the way those making TV commercials use a camera.

Secondly, go to a window and *look long distance* rather than looking at people or things that are very close to you. The further away you can see, the more you will feel in control of what is in front of you.

The more you feel in control, the less rapidly you move your eyes .

In summary, to take control of what is about you:

- *move your eyes quickly when looking at that which is close.*
- *move your eyes more slowly when looking long distance.*

2. TRUST

After a severe shock, you will find that it becomes harder *to trust* anyone again.

The shock showed you that the world is *unpredictable*. And if you can't predict what people might do, you can't trust them.

Hope

Trust and hope go together. Both are linked with your ability to predict what is going to happen in the future.

You get hope by recalling recent *success*. For example, you succeeded in starting your car yesterday. Today, you remember that. In turn, that memory gives you hope that it will start tomorrow. Indeed, you can even trust that it will.

Trauma damages both trust and hope. It does this by introducing 'the pendulum effect' as follows:

The damage to hope

- *Your hopes will go up.* You will hope for too much - such as money, power, food, drink and sex
- *Your hopes will go down.* You will become depressed, indifferent and withdrawn.

The damage to trust

- *You will trust too much -* since you have lost your sense of danger due to chemicals in your blood or:
- *You will trust too little.* You become overly cautious with people.

In other words, after severe shock you remember failures, not success.

Without a memory of recent success, you could expect any or all of the following:

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LEARNING

YOU MAY HAVE TROUBLE LEARNING

To learn, you have to be gentle. Only gentle people are teachable.

The opposite of a gentleman is a hard man. A hard man is one whose muscles have become tight. And this tightness is caused by anxiety.

As anxiety goes up, learning goes down. You become more interested in keeping danger out than in letting knowledge in.

It follows that when your anxiety increases to terror, all learning stops. In fact all systems in the body not needed for survival are shut down till the emergency is over. It is even reported that children stop growing during an emergency! (Their growth rate comes back to normal when the emergency has passed).

But your body does not know when the emergency is over. You live in a constant state of terror. And so, to you, what is important is *survival*, not learning or any other form of growth.

To survive, you have become very cautious, on the one hand, while taking risks on the other hand (the pendulum effect). By doing this, you protect yourself from danger. And new ideas might be dangerous!

To protect yourself, you find yourself keeping new ideas at a distance. In other words, you stop learning. This does not mean that you are stupid. It means you probably have been traumatised.

As a result, *you will have trouble concentrating*. You simply can't 'take in' what you are reading. Nor can you 'take in' what others are saying.

What to do

To improve your concentration, relax your muscles!

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FUTURE BLINDNESS

YOU MAY HAVE TROUBLE PREDICTING THE FUTURE

To predict what is going to happen, it helps to know what has happened. The odds are that it will happen again. For example, the sun rose yesterday so it is a safe bet that it will rise tomorrow.

But you don't want *to talk* about the past. Especially in front of strangers. You know how to 'keep your mouth shut' or how to keep a 'stiff upper lip'. In short, you know how to play dumb - like a student who cannot learn.

Nor do you want *to hear* anyone else talking about the past. You know how to 'turn a deaf ear'. Nobody can teach you anything since you know too much already.

Nor do you want *to look* at the past because it was shocking. You 'turn a blind eye' to it. You have nothing to learn from your shocking past!

In other words, through trauma, you become deaf, dumb and blind. Just like the three brass monkeys. "Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil".

The problem

If you won't face the past, you won't face the future either.

For example, if you don't look at where you've been, you won't be able to tell where you are going. You cannot *foresee* what your impulsive actions are leading to. You cannot see consequences. Rather, you face the future alone and helpless as if with your hands over your ears, mouth and eyes.

And so you walk straight into danger!

As a result, you become afraid of making a decision in case you make a mistake.

To make decisions, you now find yourself going to *fortune tellers* rather than to a trauma counsellor. You follow *astrologists* and stars rather than common sense. In short, you turn to magic to help you face your future. Just like a child.

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YOUR IMAGE

YOU WORRY ABOUT HOW OTHERS SEE YOU

Trauma makes you split yourself into two parts.

One part of you will want to vanish and not be seen. You will find yourself living a very secret life.

The other part will go in the opposite direction (the pendulum effect); you will want to be 'like everyone else'.

To be like others, you will worry about your *public image*. Image is everything to people who have been shocked.

To create a good image, you will focus on *style, fashion and control*. By dressing up and dressing people down, you make people think you are in control. In this way, you think you will be seen, noticed and listened to.

Being *someone* is important to traumatised people who have learned how to vanish.

Of course, all you are doing is putting on a false face. The mask merely hides your real self which feels so alone and helpless. The mask only creates the *illusion* of power and control.

Shame and guilt

The more you hide your true self behind a mask, the more you feel *shame and guilt*.

For example, you feel shame and guilt about your addiction.

Equally, you may find yourself saying or doing things that make other people feel shame and guilt as well.

This is particularly true when you are in a relationship.

What to do

Learn how to accept yourself by talking to a trauma counsellor. This should assist you in dealing with shame and guilt.

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FEAR OF INTIMACY

YOU BECOME AFRAID OF CLOSENESS

In relationships, there are two major themes. These are known as:

- **authority** - which one of us is the 'boss' or who is in control?
- **intimacy** - how close will I get to you?

The more you move towards one, the more you move away from the other. And so getting the balance right is important if the relationship is to work.

As a traumatised person, your chances of getting this balance right are limited. Trauma makes you swing between extremes. In any case, you simply have to take control so as to feel safe in this world.

The problem in relationships is that the more you take control, the less the other person will trust you. Which, of course, is why the leader of a group will delegate *some* of her authority to others. She wants them to trust her.

If a leader hold onto *all* authority (control), people may go along with her but they simply will not trust her. She may become their teacher, but they will never learn. ***People who do not trust cannot learn.***

It follows that when you start controlling in a relationship, your partner will find it hard to trust you.

And since taking control moves you away from *intimacy*, you will find it hard to get close to your partner - especially in the sexual area.

What to do

- Stay in control till you feel safe
- Ask your partner *to give you permission* to be in control
- When you've got permission, take small steps towards intimacy that you can make safely. This process can take some time.

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IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR

YOU BECOME IMPULSIVE IN YOUR ACTIONS

In an emergency situation, you do not need to think or feel. All that matters is that you *move quickly*. This type of action is called *impulsive*.

For impulsive and traumatised people, only the present moment matters. Only the present is real. Life can only be protected *here and now*.

This means that you will look for satisfaction here and now. That's why you've got to move quickly right now. If you don't get the reward now, you never will!

Acting like a child

If you think about it, you are now behaving like a child. In fact, when a group of traumatised people get together, they can look like a bunch of teenagers at a party. "Eat, drink and be merry because we don't expect to live too long anyway!"

This impulsive side of you explains why you are ready to fight 'at the drop of a hat'. It explains bed-wetting; all animals release urine on impulse when getting ready to run from danger (to reduce their weight and so increase their speed).

Impulsive actions and trust

However all such impulsive actions are *inconsistent*. You charge forward one moment, then run for cover the next. Nobody can *predict* what you are going to do.

Being unpredictable might save your life in a battle, but in peace time it becomes a nuisance. People will not trust anyone who is inconsistent and unpredictable.

What to do:

- Slow yourself down
- Think about the *outcome* you want
- Act *consistently* to reach that outcome

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MEMORY

YOUR MEMORY IS DAMAGED

All of us have two different types of memory. We remember things as *pictures* in our mind. And when we put *words* on them, we also remember them in words.

Trauma can split these two memories so that:

- You can see the pictures in your mind but can't talk about them (like a baby)
- You can talk about them but have no mental pictures (you have amnesia)

In other words, you may remember 'what happened' but feel nothing. Or else you feel panic at times but have no memory of what frightened you in the first place.

The inconsistency of your memory lowers your ability to trust.

How your damaged memory affects relationships

If you talk to someone who does not trust, you will find that, "It's like talking to a brick wall".

The same holds true for you. Since your trust has been damaged by shock, you have trouble learning. Nothing others say will get through to you. You have become that brick wall.

In other words, you will find it hard:

- to *hear* what others are saying.
- to *see* the world as others see it.
- to *remember* what they said.

In short, you can have trouble *understanding others*.

You, of course, will not notice this. You will only see yourself as the prisoner behind the wall, "Living a life of quiet desperation."

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3. CONFIDENCE

After a severe shock you lost *confidence* in yourself and in others.

This takes place as you *doubt* the evidence of your senses. You find yourself saying, “I can’t believe that anyone would do such a thing!” In other words, you can’t believe what your eyes say or your ears heard. “It makes no sense!”

The loss of meaning

Things are *meaningful* when you hold them in common with others.

For example, being a Catholic only makes sense to Catholics. And being a Protestant only makes sense to Protestants. Having something in common with others *connects* you to them. And connections make sense for survival.

Trauma occurs when connections are broken. That’s why:

- it makes you feel unsafe; it threatens your survival.
- it seems senseless; it happened to you and not to others.

It follows that if something happens to you but not to others, then that event will have no meaning to you. Or if you have nothing in common with others, your life will become meaningless. It won’t make any sense.

For example, let’s say you get shot. That does not usually happen to everyone. So it will appear to you as *senseless*.

Or if you are the *only* survivor of a plane crash, then your living will make no sense to you. You may feel guilty about surviving. You may go through life punishing yourself for having lived when so many died.

Once you become aware that ‘what happened’ makes no sense, you think that you are going out of your mind or going crazy.

But ***YOU ARE NOT GOING MAD.*** You are only in a state of shock at being cut off from others and in danger of not surviving.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Traumatic events seem senseless. They don't fit in with your version of how things ought to be. So you set out to make some sense of them.

That's one reason why you will keep going 'over and over' what happened in your mind. You're looking for the meaning of it. That's why you are liable *to repeat the trauma* - to find its meaning.

For example, after the Vietnam War, a lot of traumatised soldiers went to Africa as mercenaries. They were *acting out* the original trauma as though trying to make sense of it.

Likewise, girls who were raped as children often become prostitutes. They were traumatised once, and now *act out* the original abuse. They are trying to find the meaning of it.

To remember or to act out a trauma is to repeat it. It is to relive it.

Finding a partial meaning

Many victims use 'home remedies' to heal their injuries.

A 'home remedy' can be alcohol or drugs. However, these only leave you 'living a life of quiet desperation'. By abusing yourself, you only *relive* the original abuse.

Finding the full meaning

The US accepted World War 2 veterans as 'heroes' - but not those from Vietnam. And so the latter had trouble recovering from trauma.

Clearly, how your social world of family and friends see you is important. If the world sees you as a hero, you will be fine. But if you are seen as a 'fool' or 'victim', you may be in trouble.

Your task is to change their perception to 'hero'. You do that by acting as a *witness*, not as a victim or survivor. That's why you join a group. A group can *speak out* (witness) better than an individual. Break the silence!

REBUILDING CONFIDENCE

How to restore confidence

1. *Create hope.*

To do this, see yourself as *succeeding* at something.

Start with little successes. For example, getting paid for your work. Or becoming successful in helping others.

The memory of recent success will give you hope. And that in turn will raise your confidence.

2. *Reduce your terror by facing fear.*

Try a new activity that might scare you - but not too much. For example, if you've never been in a boat, hire a cruiser for a day. Or join a group that goes hill walking.

By facing your fears in this way, you will get back your confidence.

3. *Think of your rights rather than your needs.*

Trauma makes you think that you need support. So keep in mind that you have the *right* to support yourself. Ask your partner to respect your rights.

Here are some of your rights:

- You have the right to take control.
- You have the right to feel angry about what happened.
- You have the right to be terrified.
- You have the right not to forgive.
- You have the right to act like an adult.
- You have the right to speak out about what happened.

Use your rights to restore your confidence.

REVIEW

In relationships, there are two major issues. These are:

- Authority (control)
- Intimacy (closeness)

These have to be balanced to make the relationship work.

The problem

Trauma disturbs the balance. It makes you focus on CONTROL to deal with:

- the 'learned helplessness'
- the addiction

These leave you feeling out of control. They damage your trust and hope.

Being in control makes you feel safe. But the more you take control, the less others will trust you.

The less you are trusted, the more you lose confidence.

You end up like a child:

- unable to learn
- unable to read the future
- worried about how you look
- afraid of getting close to anyone
- unable to play (and so unable to understand others)
- impulsive in action

Point to remember

The best way to take control in a relationship is to give the other person *permission* to be in control.

SOME FINAL NOTES

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FINAL NOTES

These are several important lessons you learn from trauma.

1. TRAUMA TAKES CENTRE STAGE.

When you first look back at your life, you see your trauma as, “Just another thing among many that happened on the day”. It had the same importance as the others.

Hopefully now you see it as of *central* importance. This is because of its long-term effects.

Once you become traumatised, everything else takes on a secondary importance to you. This includes history, politics, class, colour, wealth, even religion!

2. TRAUMA IS CATCHING.

This means that if you work with or care about someone who has been badly shocked, you too will be shocked. You will be traumatised.

As a result, you are in danger of becoming *addicted to helping* the traumatised.

That is why you must get someone to watch over you. You need them to point out your addiction. If you don't, you will deny that you are becoming an addict.

3. TRAUMA AFFECTS YOUR COMMUNITY.

Trauma is catching. *IT IS CONTAGIOUS*. It affects all who love you or work with you. It affects your surrounding community. It moves out from you in widening circles. Just like the shockwave of an earthquake.

4. TRAUMA HAS DELAYED EFFECTS

Not only does the shockwave move through space, but also through *time*. It can hit you 15 or 20 years later.

(Continued)

You may seem to cope well immediately after a shock. But later, it can hit you hard. Especially when you come to retirement or having nothing to do. Knowing this will prepare you for what may be coming.

5. TRAUMA AFFECTS FUTURE GENERATIONS.

The shock-wave can move further through time. It affects future generations.

Indeed, many of us may still be affected by the shock-wave coming from the Great Irish Famine of 1845 - 1851.

In short, trauma creates 'time bombs'.

6. MEN AND WOMEN REACT DIFFERENTLY TO TRAUMA

Men become depressed quicker. They also stay depressed longer.

This may be because women are better than men at talking. They find it easier to talk to a trauma counsellor.

Men, on the other hand, keep things to themselves. They will even deny having flashbacks or nightmares!

However, men can talk when in a group of men. Especially of men who have had similar experiences.

7. TRAUMA HAS SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

Religion can be very useful when dealing with trauma. If you have been 'through hell', then you might find it helpful to turn to your God.

BOTH RELIGION AND THE HEALING OF TRAUMAS CALL YOU TO SEPARATE FROM EVIL.

In fact, the opposite of addiction in the English language is 'devotion'.

COPING WITH TRAUMA

There are two different ways of coping with trauma. These are as follows:

- you act like a child
- you act like an adult

1. ACTING LIKE A CHILD

You act like a child when you swing between:

- the FIGHT response.
This is when you feel a very strong urge to *control* everything.
- the FLIGHT response.
This is when you want to be relieved of control by turning to:
 - gambling
 - working all the time
 - shopping a lot
 - eating too much or too little
 - drinking
 - taking drugs.

2. ACTING LIKE AN ADULT

You act like an adult when you:

- Think before you act
- Think of the OUTCOME you want before you act
- Act so as to influence outcomes.

In short, when you live a *healthy life*.

INFLUENCE OVER OUTCOMES

Living a healthy life means:

- Let go of the past
- Make decisions in the present
- Influence the future.

1. LET GO OF THE PAST

You are addicted to the past because of trauma. You can't move on till you let go. To let it go is to break your addiction.

To do this, you forgive. Forgiveness means letting go of your RESENTMENT. This will not be easy since your memories get you 'high' and feed resentment. And when you nurse resentment, you become depressed.

To protect yourself, throw out the whole bag of memories and grudges.

2. MAKE DECISIONS

Fight your 'learned helplessness'. Refuse to go 'silently into the night'. Take personal control of your life by making your own decisions.

3. INFLUENCE THE FUTURE

To do this, first think of the future. Ask yourself, "What do I want to end up with?" Then 'think backwards' to the present. In other words:

- Ask yourself, "What steps do I have to take to get there?"
- Ask, "What is the price I will have to pay" and, "Is it worth it?"
- If it is not worth it, DON'T START IT.

Only do that which will get you what you WANT. Fight the impulse to do that which you FEEL like doing.

WAYS TO COPE WITH TRAUMA

1. THE CHILD'S FIGHT RESPONSE

- USE TACTICS THAT WORKED IN THE PAST

- TAKE CONTROL

stay alone

stay alert

check everything

- TRUST NOBODY

avoid others

avoid intimacy

become a teacher, not a learner

expect to die soon

move impulsively

fight at the drop of a hat

beware of the past and future

split into two parts (like Jekyll and Hyde)

- BELIEVE NOBODY

WAYS TO COPE WITH TRAUMA

2. THE CHILD'S FLIGHT RESPONSE

- LEARNED HELPLESSNESS
- CLINGING AND DEPENDING
- HIDING FROM THE TRUTH
(becoming deaf, dumb and blind like a brass monkey)
- DAY DREAMING
- FLOATING THROUGH LIFE
- LETTING THINGS FLOAT THROUGH YOUR MIND
- REFUSING TO OWN YOUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS OR ACTS
- BECOMING AN ADDICT, GOING NUMB
- BECOMING A VICTIM

WAYS TO COPE WITH TRAUMA

3. THE ADULT HEALTHY RESPONSE

- TAKE PERSONAL CONTROL

- GET INVOLVED IN TASKS THAT HAVE MEANING TO YOU

- CHANGE YOUR LIFESTYLE
 - cut out sugar, coffee and tobacco

 - take hard exercise

 - learn to relax

- GET LOTS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Congratulations!

You made it to the end of the book.

Now, like the rest of us, you will have to start all over again, You start again because you won't remember very much.

If you can't remember, it is not that you are stupid. It is because you were traumatised.

All of us traumatised people have trouble 'taking it in'.

However, the more you read it, the more it will 'stick'. It will become easier to grasp.

You will be able to use it to help others. But go slowly with them. Spoon feed them with information. Don't swamp them with too much stuff.

And enjoy the rest of your life!

NOTES

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