

Trauma Overview

People are experiencing a number of varieties of symptoms, all of which are normal:

- Anxiety, agitation, fear, nervousness, panic symptoms, feeling unsafe
- Sadness, grief, loss
- Overwhelm, fatigue, exhaustion
- Intrusive thoughts, hyperfixation, doom scrolling, reading the news a lot, being bombarded by images/media and information, **nightmares**
- Avoidance, not wanting to leave the house, not feeling safe in public spaces, not feeling safe in crowds, not feeling safe outside
- Hypervigilance, feeling on edge, being on the look out for danger
- Dissociation, numbing out, spacing out, can't process, alexithymia (I can't figure out what I'm feeling), feeling disconnected from self and/or others, feeling detached and/or disembodied, derealization (it doesn't feel real)
- Disruptions in sleeping or eating

I'm seeing a lot of anxiety and fear leading to avoidance. Varying degrees of feeling scared of being outside, public spaces. I think it's the primary concern for a lot of people: how do I leave the house again? How do I feel safe in public spaces in my own home town again? **What you're experiencing is normal and an understandable reaction to an overwhelming trauma and stress. Be kind to yourself.** The trauma took away our sense of safety, and our minds are trying to find homeostasis to regain it. That means we may gravitate toward avoidance for a while in order to regain a sense of safety. Take baby steps. Do not push yourself or your loved one/child, take time to rebuild safety slowly. Spend time with trusted loved ones. Do things in small groups or with another person if you can while you rebuild your sense of safety. Build it little by little and check in with your body for signs of distress. Do not over-do it. Trauma is a long haul.

Our minds need to balance trauma processing (thinking and talking about it with professionals and supportive loved ones) with constructive distraction (hobbies, work,



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school, activities we enjoy, time with friends and family, things that take our mind off of it). Make space for both, check in with your mind and body as needed.

We need to regulate our sympathetic nervous systems, which are responsible for fight, flight, freeze, panic symptoms.

Coping/Things that help:

- Deep breathing
- Talking through trauma as needed so we feel less alone and start processing and develop habituation/distress tolerance/ systematic desensitization
- Icing the vagus nerve: put an ice pack on your left clavicle/toward the center of your chest for 15 minutes. It will help re-regulate your sympathetic nervous system
- Coping that engages the five senses (see, smell, taste, touch, hear): good music, a calming bath, a good book, soft and/or weighted blankets, hugs (touch is a big one to co-regulate!), exercise/walking, rest, yoga, soothing food
- Ongoing therapy, processing with a professional to regulate intrusive thoughts and symptoms

Be on the lookout for ongoing dissociative features because these are the most concerning, especially if they accompany a decrease in functioning and other worrying symptoms.

Steps moving forward:

- Engage coping skills listed above
- Seek ongoing trauma therapy when you're ready to process/talk
- Spend time in nature when you can and feel safe
- Surround yourself with loved ones/community
- Give care and receive care, support others and let yourself be supported in times of need