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Psychological Recovery after Trauma: A self help guide

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Abstract: *Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world. Psychological trauma can leave you struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety that won't go away. It can also leave you feeling numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people.*

Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and isolated can result in trauma, even if it doesn't involve physical harm. It's not the objective circumstances that determine whether an event is traumatic, but your subjective emotional experience of the event. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized. Psychological trauma may result when a person experiences or witnesses an incredibly disturbing or scary event. Mental trauma typically impacts one's ability to cope and function normally. This research paper stretches more understanding about the signs of trauma, how it affects the brain, and how it's treated can help you or a loved one recognize the problem and begin taking steps toward recovery.

Key Words : Emotional, psychological, trauma, anxiety, numb, traumatized, cope, brain.

The first goal of trauma recovery should and must be to improve your quality of life on a daily basis". (Rothschild, 2010) According to the American Psychological Association (APA), trauma is "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. "However, a person may experience trauma as a response to any event they find physically or emotionally threatening or harmful. A traumatized person can feel a range of emotions both immediately after the event and in the long term. They may feel overwhelmed, helpless, shocked, or have difficulty processing their experiences. Trauma can also cause physical symptoms. There are several types of trauma, including:

Acute trauma- This results from a single stressful or dangerous event.

Chronic trauma- This results from repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful events. Examples include cases of child abuse, bullying, or domestic violence.

Complex trauma- This results from exposure to multiple traumatic events.

Traumatic events can be isolated or repeated, ongoing events. A person can also experience trauma after witnessing something traumatic happening to someone else. People have different reactions to traumatic events. For example, those who live through the same natural disaster can respond very differently despite experiencing the same event. Trauma is a person's emotional response to a distressing experience. Few people can go through life without encountering some kind of trauma.

Types of Traumas- Acute trauma reflects intense distress in the immediate aftermath of a one-time event and the reaction is of short duration. Common examples include a car crash, physical or sexual assault, or the sudden death of a loved one. Chronic trauma can arise from harmful events that are repeated or prolonged. It can develop in response to persistent bullying, neglect, abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual), and violence. Complex trauma can arise from experiencing repeated or multiple traumatic events from which there is no possibility of escape. The sense of being trapped is a feature of the experience.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) cover a wide range of difficult situations that children either directly face or witness while growing up, before they have developed effective coping skills. ACEs can disrupt the normal course of development and the emotional injury can last long into adulthood. The loss of a parent; neglect; emotional,



physical, or sexual abuse; and divorce are among the most common types of adverse childhood experiences.

Trauma is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as the emotional response someone has to an extremely negative event. While trauma is a normal reaction to a horrible event, the effects can be so severe that they interfere with an individual's ability to live a normal life. In a case such as this, help may be needed to treat the stress and dysfunction caused by the traumatic event and to restore the individual to a state of emotional well-being.

Emotional Symptoms of Trauma- Emotion is one of the most common ways in which trauma manifests. Some common emotional symptoms of trauma include denial, anger, sadness and emotional outbursts. Victim of trauma may redirect the overwhelming emotions they experience toward other sources, such as friends or family members. This is one of the reasons why trauma is difficult for loved ones as well. It is hard to help someone who pushes you away, but understanding the emotional symptoms that come after a traumatic event can help ease the process.

Physical Symptoms of Trauma- Trauma often manifests physically as well as emotionally. Some common physical signs of trauma include paleness, lethargy, fatigue, poor concentration and a racing heartbeat. The victim may have anxiety or panic attacks and be unable to cope in certain circumstances. The physical symptoms of trauma can be as real and alarming as those of physical injury or illness, and care should be taken to manage stress levels after a traumatic event.

How does psychological trauma affect the brain- The parasympathetic nervous system, in turn, either checks out when it should be active or kicks into high gear when it should be at rest, causing the symptoms listed above. Researchers have compared the brains of trauma survivors to those of the general population. They've concluded that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affects parts of the brain associated with memory, emotion, thought, sense of self, and conflict resolution. These areas include the hippocampus, amygdala, and the anterior cingulate cortex. Changes in metabolic activity, neurotransmitter levels, and neuron health may contribute to the heightened levels of stress that trauma survivors experience.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)- Individuals who suffer from PTSD will have experienced trauma and experience a constellation of symptoms which may include: intrusive distressing memories, nightmares, flashbacks, distress related to reminders of the trauma, avoidance of reminders of the trauma, inability to remember an important aspect of the trauma, persistent/exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself/others or the world, self-blame for the trauma, persistent negative emotions, decreased interest in activities, feelings of estrangement from others, inability to experience positive emotions, irritability, anger outbursts, reckless or self-destructive behaviour, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, problems with concentration and difficulty sleeping. PTSD, or posttraumatic stress disorder, is a set of reactions that can occur after someone has been through a traumatic event. The chance of developing PTSD depends on the type of event experienced, but about 5 to 10% of Australians will suffer from PTSD at some point in their lives.

The main symptoms of PTSD are-

* Re-living the traumatic event through distressing, unwanted memories, vivid nightmares and/or flashbacks. This can also include feeling very upset or having intense physical reactions such as heart palpitations or being unable to breathe when reminded of the traumatic event.

* Avoiding reminders of the traumatic event, including activities, places, people, thoughts or feelings that bring back memories of the trauma.

* Negative thoughts and feelings such as fear, anger, guilt, or feeling flat or numb a lot of the time. A person might blame themselves or others for what happened during or after the traumatic event, feel cut-off from friends and family, or lose interest in day-to-day activities.

* Feeling wound-up- This might mean having trouble sleeping or concentrating, feeling angry or irritable,



taking risks, being easily startled, and/or being constantly on the lookout for danger.

* It is not unusual for people with PTSD to experience other mental health problems as well, like depression or anxiety. Some people may develop a habit of using alcohol or drugs as a way of coping.

Stages of Recovery from Trauma-

Stage One: Safety, stabilization, and overcoming dysregulation- The first step in recovering from trauma involves re-establishing feelings of safety and stability. Traumatized individuals often do not feel safe in their bodies and their relationships. Regaining a sense of safety involves creating a secure and predictable environment where you are free from physical and emotional injury and have established a degree of emotional stability. This involves the ability to calm your body, soothe your mind, and to be able to manage posttraumatic symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares that may be triggered by common events.

Stage Two: Remembrance, mourning, and coming to terms with traumatic memories- This stage involves overcoming fear of the traumatic memories so they may become integrated into your sense of self. This stage is best approached with the assistance of a psychologist. During this stage of healing, therapies such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) are utilized.

Stage Three: Reconnection and integration- In this stage, you create a new sense of self and a new future which involves redefining yourself in regards to meaningful relationships. During this stage, the trauma is no longer a driving force in your life. The trauma becomes part of your life story, although it is no longer the primary story that defines you. You begin to feel empowered and embrace life with purpose and meaning.

Stage Four: Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)- After the three stages are accomplished, the goal is to progress to the stage of posttraumatic growth (PTG). Posttraumatic growth is the phase where you may be changed by your experience of trauma and adversity, sometimes in exceptionally powerful ways. Posttraumatic growth is achieved when positive psychological changes are experienced as a result of the trauma or adversity, and this raises you to a higher level of functioning than you may otherwise have achieved. Posttraumatic growth is not about returning to life as it was before the experience, but instead, it is a shift in thinking about how you relate to the world.

Conclusion- Individuals can suffer trauma in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Trauma sufferers may themselves have seen their homes or communities destroyed or be victims of physical abuse such as rape, torture, or other violence. Trauma can also be induced by serious threat or harm to loved ones. Individuals are often unable to cope with these extreme events, consequently inhibiting both their ability to carry on with life and to function in society. Trauma can have a range of different cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioural effects on individuals. Mind exercise can do wonders like none. However, it is difficult to put the mind into that when one's dealing with a trauma. It's better to join yoga classes and practice mindfulness for an hour or two. Once you feel you can concentrate on it, you can do it at home. Various yoga poses like Surya Namaskar have proven benefits for mental health and have been seen giving a boost to the brain's functioning. One can always heal and rebuild, and become whole again even though one might never be able to go back to what they were prior to the loss. If one deals with their emotions and faces them, the process of healing speeds up in opposition to the case where people try to run away from their feelings. Time is undoubtedly the best healer which makes it easy to deal with things, but till then, being patient and cognitive with one's emotions is imperative.

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