

ROADMAP TO TRAUMA AND PTSD

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Trauma is far more common than you might think, with the vast majority (70%) of people experiencing at least one traumatic event during their lifetimes. The effects of trauma, especially without the right support, can feel earth-shattering. Trauma has the potential to shift your worldview, sense of self, and relationships. It can also lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a clinical mental health diagnosis.

Trauma and PTSD can be overcome. This Roadmap provides an understanding of what trauma and PTSD are, their potential impact, how to cope, and where to find credible resources to further your healing journey.

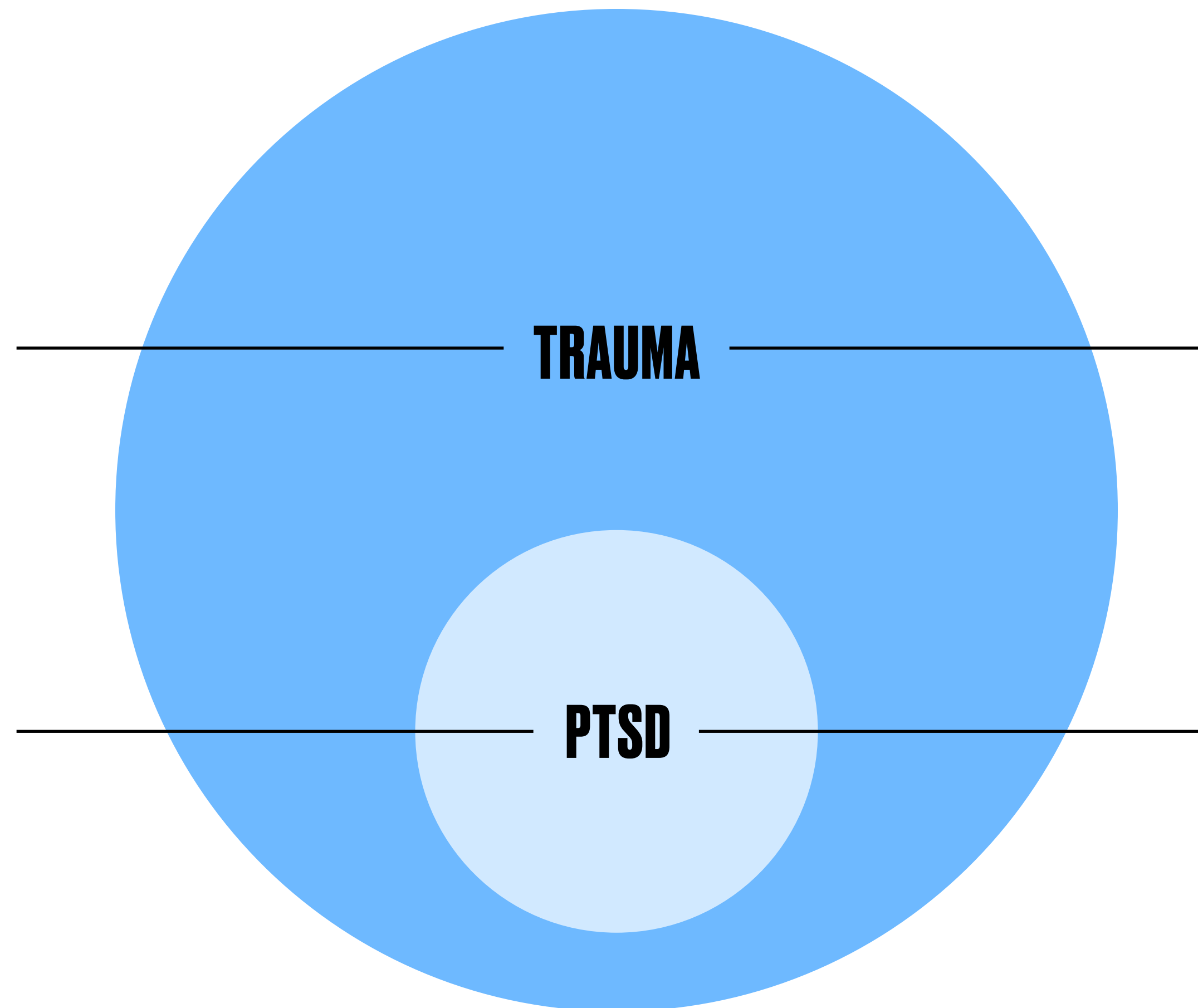
Read on for more, and if this content ever becomes too difficult to read, skip to **page 9** for coping skills, or take a break and engage in a soothing activity.

**THE MENTAL
HEALTH
COALITION**

WHAT ARE TRAUMA AND PTSD?

Trauma is the emotional or psychological response to a deeply distressing experience or situation. It typically creates a sense of fear that does not have to but can have lasting effects on wellbeing.

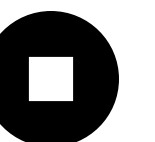
Post-traumatic stress disorder, aka PTSD, is a clinical mental health diagnosis resulting from traumatic experience(s) that leads to a specific set of symptoms.



While not all trauma leads to PTSD, all PTSD stems from trauma.

The emotional or psychological response to a deeply distressing experience or situation. Creates a deep sense of fear that does not have to but can have lasting effects on wellbeing.

A clinical mental health diagnosis resulting from traumatic experience(s) that leads to a specific set of symptoms.



SOURCES OF TRAUMA

Some common **sources** of trauma (and therefore PTSD) include:

Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, cultural, financial)

Accidents resulting in injury

Assault

Death of loved ones

Discrimination

Harassment

Incarceration

Poverty

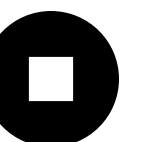
Medical interventions

Natural disasters

Neglect

Warfare

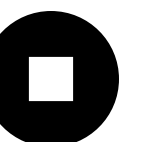
Witnessing violence



TYPES OF TRAUMA

While there are many **types** of trauma, these are some of the more common ones:

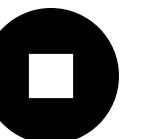
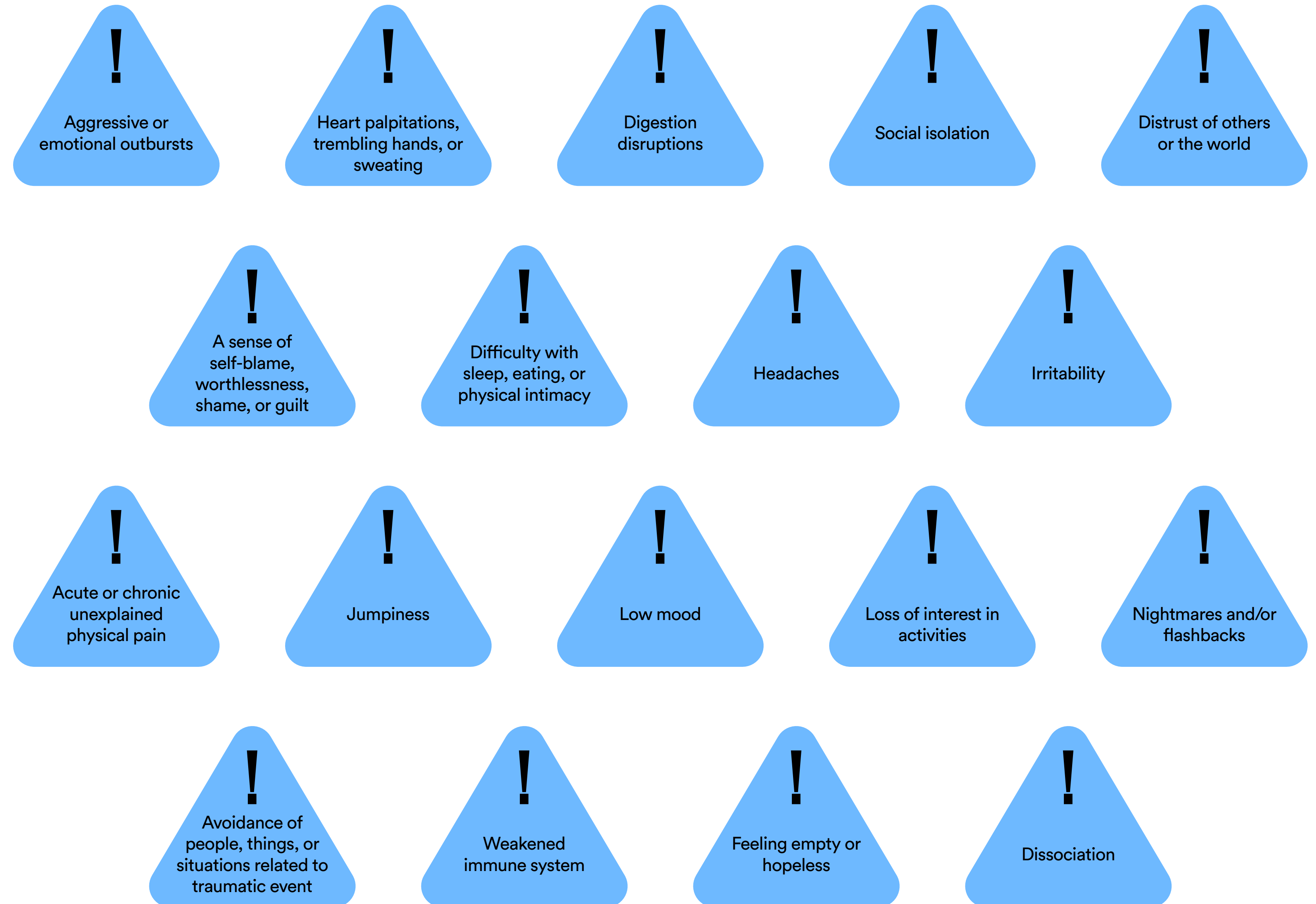
| TYPES OF TRAUMA | DEFINITION | EXAMPLES |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Acute Trauma | A single distressing incident → trauma | Surviving a hate crime |
| Chronic Trauma | Prolonged, repeated experiences → trauma | Financial abuse that unfolds over years |
| Complex Trauma | Multiple distressing events that are interpersonal and invasive in nature → trauma | Ongoing child abuse, intimate partner violence |
| Collective Trauma | A major event experienced by a group of individuals or within a community → trauma | Historical trauma, the COVID-19 pandemic |
| Interpersonal Trauma | Mistreatment from another person or persons → trauma | Abuse, combat, assault, discrimination |
| Non-Interpersonal Trauma | Highly distressing experiences that do not originate from human behavior → trauma | Medical diagnoses, natural disasters |
| Intergenerational Trauma | Terrifying events experienced by one generation → similar trauma-based reactions in next generation(s) | Historical trauma, slavery, the Holocaust |
| Secondary Trauma | Learning about the traumatic experiences of others, especially those you are close to → trauma | A loved one recounting an assault they survived |



WARNING SIGNS

To stop trauma from progressing to PTSD, early care and support after traumatic events is crucial. And knowing the **warning signs** of PTSD can go a long way in recognizing when support is needed. Here they are:

If you or someone you know is in crisis, having thoughts of suicide, or needs a safe place to talk, you or they can call **988** or text the Crisis Text Line by texting “**COALITION**” to **741-741**.



HOW TRAUMA AND PTSD IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH

The impact of trauma can touch all major aspects of life. Here are some common ways trauma and PTSD can affect your wellbeing.

DAILY IMPACT

Trauma and PTSD can lead to difficulties that negatively impact life on a daily basis. Some of these include:

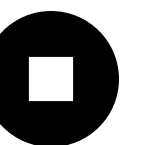
- Detachment from or negative **sense of self**
- Jaded, fearful, or mistrustful **view of the world or other people**
- Diminished **sense of safety**
- Strained **relationships**
- Difficulty **regulating emotions**
- Decline in performance at **work**
- Decline in **school** performance
- Impaired **cognitive functioning** (e.g., memory, focus)

CLINICAL IMPACT

Trauma can lead to difficulties that are so severe that a clinical diagnosis and treatment are necessary. Experiences of trauma can raise your susceptibility to:

- PTSD**
- Complex PTSD**
- Prolonged grief disorder**
- Other mental health conditions**
- Medical conditions**

It is important to keep in mind that none of these are destined to happen after trauma, and none of these have to be permanent, especially when armed with knowledge and coping skills (see p.9).



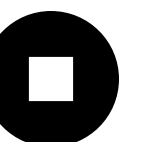
TRAUMA AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

While anyone can experience trauma, some communities are disproportionately affected by trauma due to systemic inequity. Thinking intersectionally about social group identities like **race, ethnicity, culture, social class, sexual and gender identity, ability status, nationality, and religion** is important when exploring trauma and PTSD.

These are some factors that can lead to higher levels of trauma and PTSD based on social group identity:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Discrimination and prejudice | Environmental inequities (see Climate Change Roadmap) |
| Infringement of rights | Law enforcement violence |
| Othering or social exclusion | Religious persecution |
| Resource deprivation due to inequity | Unjust legal system |
| Identity-based harassment or assault | Micro- and macro-aggressions |
| Religious trauma | |

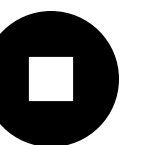
Although daunting, in the face of injustices like these, working to build your own joy can be an act of resistance. Read on for ideas on how to cope.



TRAUMA AND VETERANS

Active duty service members and Veterans are faced with traumatic experiences inherent to the nature of their work. Exposure to trauma over time can impact mental health and well-being. Many service members find difficulty in talking to their friends and families about their experiences and the lasting impact those experiences have on their lives. This can leave Veterans feeling isolated. However, **you don't have to struggle alone**. Read on to learn more about coping tools and treatment options.

IF YOU ARE A VETERAN OR KNOW A VETERAN IN NEED OF SUPPORT, CALL 988, THEN PRESS 1 TO BE CONNECTED WITH A RESPONDER QUALIFIED TO SUPPORT VETERANS.



COPING WITH TRAUMA AND PTSD

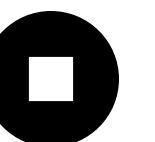
When it comes to trauma and PTSD, there are many sources of healing. It is important to know where to look, find what works specifically for you, and be ready to take steps toward implementing coping strategies.

Daily Tools

Here are five ways to promote healing after a traumatic event. These can be done on your own for free or low cost.

| THE SKILL | THE WHY | THE HOW |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Connect with others | Social support is one of the best antidotes to trauma and PTSD. Consider who in your life you can lean on or be vulnerable with. | Video chat with a close friend to talk about how you're feeling. If you can't think of someone, seek out a support group online. |
| Connect with yourself | Trauma and PTSD can disconnect you from yourself in many ways. Practice mindfulness techniques in order to find yourself again. | Practice a mindful body scan. Set a timer for three minutes, close your eyes, and just notice how each part of your body feels, scanning from your head to your toes. Try to let go of any judgment. |
| Soothe your body | Traumatic experiences can stay with us for years in the body, and attention to the physical body can be restorative. | Find an activity that feels soothing like yoga, massage, stretching, or a self-hug. |
| Build on your strengths | Trauma can negatively impact the way we view ourselves. Developing your strengths can bring you a sense of purpose and resilience. | Journal about the positive things a friend might say about you or moments that you've felt proud of yourself. |
| Practice self-love | Practicing self-love can help release self-blame and replenish a positive view of yourself after trauma. MHC's Roadmap to Self-Love can help you find ways of doing that. | Give yourself some positive self-talk or think of something kind to say to yourself. If that feels hard, try simply starting with, "I am whole." |

As with any tips for boosting mental wellbeing, the most important factor is that you find ways that work for you. If none of these speak to you, see if you can get creative and come up with some of your own.



COPING WITH TRAUMA AND PTSD

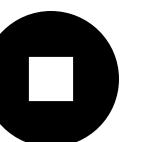
Clinical Treatments

These are more formal treatment options. While there are many forms of clinical treatment for trauma and PTSD, these are the more common and evidence-based ones.

| | |
|--|--|
| Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) | Explores the connection among behaviors, feelings, and thoughts to modify patterns that create difficulties in daily life after trauma. |
| Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) | Helps build skills to shift and challenge unhelpful beliefs related to traumatic experience(s). |
| Prolonged Exposure | Shows you how to gradually approach memories, situations, and emotions that are related to past trauma so that avoidance is reduced and a sense of freedom restored. |
| Cognitive Therapy | Modifies the damaging memories and evaluations related to traumatic experiences so that more helpful thought patterns can emerge. |
| Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) | Encourages briefly focusing on difficult memories while bilateral stimulation takes place (e.g., eye movements), which can decrease the vividness and intensity of emotions connected to those memories. |
| Brief Eclectic Psychodynamic Therapy | Combines CBT with a focus on emotions (e.g., shame and guilt) and emphasizes the healing relationship between a therapist and client. |

Additional forms of treatment include [medication](#), [TF-CBT for children/adolescents](#), [STAIR Narrative Therapy for complex trauma](#), [psychedelics](#), and [narrative exposure therapy](#). Some mind-body treatments include: [acupuncture](#), [meditation](#), and [yoga](#) for trauma and PTSD. While research is still emerging on these, depending on your interests and needs, they might be worth exploring.

*Before engaging in any of the above, consult with a licensed clinician to determine which treatment is best for you.

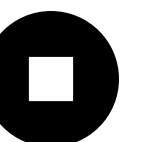


ROADBLOCKS & HOW TO SIDESTEP THEM

While these coping strategies might sound great in theory, sometimes obstacles get in the way of practicing them. Here are some common roadblocks to using coping skills and how to sidestep them.

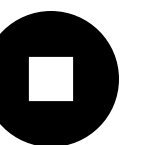
| ROADBLOCK | HOW TO SIDESTEP IT |
|--------------------|---|
| Shame | It is very common for folks who have experienced trauma to blame themselves... But remember, it's not your fault. Imagine if this happened to a loved one — would you speak to them the way you speak to yourself? |
| Resource access | Therapy can be a great way to process traumatic events, but not everyone has access to that. You may be able to find low-fee services in your area — but you can also find trusted sources online to learn about trauma, coping skills, and your legal rights. |
| Isolation | If you don't feel like you have a trusted loved one to talk to, there are plenty of other options to connect. Try looking into online forums or support groups offered by community orgs or hospitals. |
| Guilt | Guilt can be a really complex emotion. It often comes from the idea that we've hurt someone. It might help to journal or talk to someone you trust, and you may realize what you've been telling yourself only hurts yourself. |
| Discomfort or fear | After experiencing trauma, it's normal to fear places or things that remind you of the event(s). That's the part of your mind trying to protect you — there's no rush to re-engage, and you don't have to do it alone. Try reaching out to a professional or a close friend to gradually work your way up to your goals. |

Addressing these roadblocks is often the first step toward healing from trauma and PTSD.



YOU DESERVE TO FEEL SAFE AND AT PEACE.

Whatever stage of healing you are in today, remember that growth after trauma is a journey, and that journey can take time. If you feel ready, we've got more resources for you to explore —



RESOURCES

Learn More About PTSD & Trauma

[What is Trauma? \(ADAA\)](#)

[On Trauma, Racism, and How We Show Up for Each Other \(Crisis Text Line\)](#)

[Triumph Over Trauma \(Headstrong\)](#)

[Reminders for Survivors of Trauma \(NAMI\)](#)

[What is Racial Trauma? \(MHA\)](#)

[Stop AAPI Hate Resources \(NAAPIMHA\)](#)

[Multilingual Trauma Resources \(Child Mind Institute\)](#)

[Helping Kids Through Trauma \(On Our Sleeves\)](#)

[Complex Trauma Resources](#)

[Trauma Reading & Training Programs \(The Trauma Foundation\)](#)

[How to Manage Trauma - Infographic \(National Council for Behavioral Health\)](#)

Services for PTSD & Trauma

[Crisis Text Line - Text COALITION to 741741](#)

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

[National Sexual Assault Hotline by RAINN - 800-656-4673](#)

[National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative by SAMHSA](#)

[International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Clinician Directory](#)

[Safe Horizon Victim Assistance & Hotline](#)

[Racial Trauma Resources \(Not 9 to 5\)](#)

[The Headstrong Project - PTSD Treatment for Military Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families](#)

[NAMI Homefront - Program for Military Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families](#)

[PTSD Coach App for Veterans by VA's National Center for PTSD](#)

Activities for PTSD & Trauma

[A Mental Wellness Activity Book for Asian Americans \(NAAPIMHA\)](#)

[Adverse Childhood Experiences - Explore Your Number Story \(ACE Resource Network\)](#)

This Roadmap was created by Naomi Torres-Mackie, Ph.D.; Khyia Ward, M.Ed., LAC; and Anna Marie Fennell, M.Ed., MHC-LP, for The Mental Health Coalition. Special thanks to Kenneth Cole Productions and Men's Wearhouse for funding this important work.

