
Trauma And Ways Of Its Recovery

One of the major ways that recovery from trauma is managed is talking about the traumatic event. A narrative of what happened when you were a child or during the war often ensues, then the therapist might proceed to help you develop ways to cope with the negative feelings in everyday life. This might work for some people, however trauma is much more than a story of something that happened in the past. These emotions and physical sensations that were imprinted during the trauma are experienced not as distant memories but rather disruptive physical sensations in the present. In order to fully regain control of yourself and your overwhelming emotions, revisiting the trauma might need to take place. This should only occur once you feel safe and will not be retraumatized by it.

The engines of these physical post traumatic reactions resides in the emotional brain. Contrary to our rational brain which expresses itself as thoughts, the emotional brain manifests as gut wrenching sensations in the abdomen, palpitations, shallow, rapid breathing, and possibly a state of collapse, rigidity, or rage. Our rational, executive brain can help us to understand where these unwanted feelings and sensations are coming from but it cannot abolish these emotions, sensations and feelings of threat that traumatized individuals experience such as feeling that they were responsible for what happened to them or they are a terrible person because of what happened to them. Understanding why you feel a certain way does not necessarily change how you feel about the situation. When people remember, think or talk about their trauma their frontal lobe goes offline. Their speech center also goes offline, as if they were experiencing a stroke. People become dumbfounded and it is very difficult to narrate what happened to them in a logical manner. This is the area that is responsible for cognitive function in humans such as emotional expression, memory, language, judgment, problem solving and sexual behaviors. The core of trauma treatments is to get to this deep rooted pain and frozen state with bypassing language. The following treatments described below are at the core of attempting to resolve these deeply stored traumas that gets buried in the body and the crevices of the mind.

Limbic System Therapy

We have seen above the devastating effects that trauma has on the brain. One of the most fundamental issues in resolving trauma is to restore the delicate balance between the emotional and rational brain that becomes dysfunctional in trauma. This is to prevent the hypo or hyper aroused states that occur when we are pushed outside our 'window of tolerance' (state of optimal functioning). Outside of this window we become disorganized, irritable, angry, lights and sounds become bothersome, unwanted images and thoughts of the past intrude our minds or we shut down and feel completely numb inside. As long as traumatized individuals are in this hyper or hypo aroused states, they are unable to stay in control, they are unable to learn from experience, they are inflexible, uptight and depressed. In order to heal from these posttraumatic states, restoration of executive functioning is needed and accomplished through Limbic System Therapy. This involves restoring the faulty alarm systems and restoring the functions of our emotional brain which should normally function as a quiet background noise that takes care of the housekeeping items in our body such as ensuring that you eat, sleep, connect, protect yourself, and defend against danger. The medial prefrontal cortex of the brain has a direct connection with the emotional brain (limbic system) where all of the trauma lives. Neuroscientist

has shown that the only way to access the emotional brain is by activating the medial prefrontal cortex which is activated through self-awareness. They found that self awareness is the key to recovery from trauma. By noticing how we feel and becoming aware of our inner experiences and learning to befriend these sensations and emotions is the first step to resetting the emotional brain.

Somatic Therapy for Trauma

Most mainstream trauma treatments available has paid very little attention to helping traumatized individuals safely experience their bodily sensations and emotions which are often times too overwhelming for them to manage. The treatments that we have turned to have been psychopharmacologic drugs such as SSRI's and Anti-psychotics to basically dim their sensory experiences. As we know from years of research, the most natural way to calm down any form of distress is by being hugged, touched, or loved. Any form of body work should be encouraged for these individuals, whether it is therapeutic massage, Feldenkrais, or Craniosacral therapy. The Feldenkrais method consists of gentle movements and directed attention that helps to reorganize connections between the brain and body in an attempt to improve physical and psychological states. Craniosacral therapy is a form of body work that uses gentle touch to various structures to help facilitate the proper flow of cerebrospinal fluid along the brain and spinal cord. This treatment has been shown to release tensions deep within the body to relieve pain, dysfunction, and stored emotion from our cells. These treatments described all have a place for trauma treatment. We know that trauma remains in the individual long after the event has passed. The mind forgets the trauma but the body stores all of the memories. It is not uncommon for the body to feel uptight, tense, and nervous as the trauma lives inside the body. These somatic therapies are available to help people love, befriend, and feel safe inside their bodies as opposed to wanting to dissociate and numb the uncomfortable sensations that are often present.