

# BACK TO SCHOOL: *Understanding Trauma*

Trauma occurs when something bad happens that makes you feel unsafe and scared. And because this experience was a big deal, it has an ongoing impact on your life.

Lots of different kinds of events can cause trauma. Some common examples are:

BEING BULLIED

BEING ABUSED

SEEING SOMETHING VIOLENT

LOSING A LOVED ONE

NOT FEELING SAFE IN YOUR HOME

NOT FEELING SAFE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

LIVING THROUGH A DISASTER LIKE A BAD ACCIDENT, FIRE, OR HURRICANE

BEING EXPOSED TO SOMETHING BAD THAT HAPPENED TO A LOVED ONE

## *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

Your brain can be put under a lot of stress if you are experiencing trauma over a long period of time or dealing with an extreme event. When this happens, it's possible to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. If you have some of the symptoms below, you might be dealing with PTSD.<sup>1</sup>

- STRESSFUL MEMORIES OF THE EVENT THAT POP UP OFTEN AND DISTRACT YOU DURING THE DAY
  - NIGHTMARES OR TROUBLE SLEEPING
- FLASHBACKS WHICH MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE RELIVING THE TRAUMATIC EVENT
  - FEELING JUMPY AND ON EDGE
- FEELING EMOTIONALLY OR PHYSICALLY BAD WHEN YOU ARE REMINDED OF THE EVENT
  - TROUBLE CONCENTRATING
- NEGATIVE FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS ABOUT YOURSELF, OTHER PEOPLE, OR THE WORLD
  - DIFFICULTY FEELING POSITIVE OR HAPPY EMOTIONS
- DESIRE TO AVOID PEOPLE, ACTIVITIES, OR PLACES THAT REMIND YOU OF WHAT HAPPENED
  - ANGRY OUTBURSTS
- TROUBLE REMEMBERING THINGS THAT HAPPENED BEFORE OR AFTER THE TRAUMATIC EVENT
  - BLAMING YOURSELF FOR WHAT HAPPENED

## What Next?

Trauma is hard for the mind and body and you may not feel “normal” for a little while. To reverse the effects of trauma and PTSD, you have to teach your mind and body how to feel safe again. Learning how to feel safe again is best done with support. Some things that might help include: talking about what happened, being in tune with your body’s reactions to stress, changing upsetting and untrue thoughts that are in your head because of the trauma, or finding ways to help you sleep. If you find you can’t quiet your mind, try using MHA’s “Keep Your Mind Grounded” worksheet. If you need help starting a conversation, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/timetotalk](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/timetotalk) for tips on how to get started.

Traumatic events can also cause people to start having symptoms of anxiety, depression, or psychosis for the first time in their lives.

SCREENING IS AN ANONYMOUS, FREE, AND PRIVATE WAY TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND IF YOU ARE SHOWING WARNING SIGNS OF A CONDITION. A SCREENING IS NOT A DIAGNOSIS, BUT IT CAN BE A HELPFUL TOOL FOR STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE YOU TRUST ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH.



TAKE THE YOUTH SCREEN  
AT [MHASCREENING.ORG](http://MHASCREENING.ORG)

If you or someone you know is struggling, it is important to reach out for help as soon as possible. There are doctors and counselors who have special training to help people who have been through traumatic events, and the sooner you get help, the more likely you are to get better.

TRAINED CRISIS COUNSELORS ARE AVAILABLE 24/7 BY TEXTING “MHA” TO 741-741 OR CALLING 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

YOU CAN ALSO DOWNLOAD THE NOTOK APP ON GOOGLE PLAY OR THE APP STORE. THE NOTOK APP ALLOWS YOU TO IDENTIFY UP TO 5 PEOPLE WHO WILL RECEIVE A NOTIFICATION WHEN YOU PRESS A BUTTON INDICATING THAT YOU’RE NOT OK.

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.



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