

How You Can Help your Loved One who has Experienced Trauma

When your loved one has experienced a traumatic event, there are all kinds of thoughts and emotions that you experience as the "bystander". You want to help, you want to provide them with safety, and trust, and reassurance. You want to make their pain go away.

What you must understand, is that your loved one is in a state of "protection". Because their safety was threatened, they remain on high alert, trying to protect themselves from it happening again. They aren't pushing you away, or keeping things from you -- they are trying to keep themselves safe, and that safety cannot be given or reassured by you.

So what can you do, as a family member, loved one, or friend of someone who has experienced a traumatic incident in their lives?

- **Understand that they are not trusting their surroundings, themselves, or their thoughts.** This is a scary experience for anyone to feel as if you cannot trust what you see, hear, think, or feel. You don't need to try and convince them, just listen and be present.
- **Forcing, or requiring them to talk about their experience DOES NOT help.** Your loved one will talk about things as it comes up, but you don't need to force it, or pry it out of them. Just be listening, and present when they do speak.
- **Learn their "calming" language.** You want to know how you can help them get calm. What music they need, what space they need, what words they need. Ask about this when they are feeling good, or point out that something seems to help. Keep this in mind when they are feeling "on guard" or anxious.



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- **Learn what their triggers are.** You don't need to prevent them from happening, but you don't want to encourage them either. Keep note of what increases their trauma responses, and what makes them feel more anxious.
- **Find a support group for yourself.** Many therapists, hospitals, and online communities offer support and encouragement for those who have loved ones that have experienced trauma. Ask around, and do some Google searches.
- **Learn about trauma, and how it impacts a person.** Getting more information about how trauma impacts the brain, and a person's functioning, can help you understand what your loved one is going through.
- **Seek mental health treatment - for yourself or for your loved one.** This isn't something you are going to fix or heal on your own!! You need a professional to help you deal with your frustrations and anger, and your loved one needs treatment for their traumatic experience.
- **Remind yourself that this is the effect of trauma, and not your loved one turning against you.** Your loved one has been through something that was meant to break them, and they came through it. They may not be the same, they may not return to the same person. They may be different for a long time. This isn't about what you could do differently to get them "back" to who you knew, but about learning who they have become, because of what they have had to overcome.

It is hard to remain in a relationship with someone who has experienced trauma. It's even harder for someone to live through a traumatic experience. With care, compassion, understanding, and support, you and your loved one can make it through this!!!