



7-14 October 2023

THE BODY KEEPS SCORE

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Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission

WAAMH
Western Australian Association
for Mental Health



Mind responses to trauma

Trauma responses from a perceived or real fear / threat, can typically be described in the following categories:

Fight: Anger outburst, control, narcissism, explosive behaviour.

Flight: workaholic, over-thinker, panic attack, difficulty sitting still, perfectionist.

Freeze: Difficulty making decisions and focusing, dissociation, isolating, numb, stuck in one place.

Fawn: People pleaser, lack of identity, no boundaries, overwhelmed, codependent.

The body holds onto toxic stress and trauma in many ways. It can cause gut issues, inflammation, night tremors and terrors, exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, agitation, muscle stiffness, numbness, dissociation, fatigue, and physiological arousal. Some memories or triggers can illicit a serious physical response.

Body responses to trauma

Mind & Body

People who have experienced trauma live with seemingly unbearable sensations. They may feel heartbroken; afraid to feel at all; suffer from intolerable feelings in the pit of their stomach; or tightness in their chest. Avoiding or numbing these sensations in our body increases vulnerability to being overwhelmed by them.

Body & Environment

It's not so much the traumatic memory or event, but physical sensations which become the enemy. Apprehension about being hijacked by uncomfortable sensations keeps the body frozen and the mind shut. Despite past trauma, the emotional brain keeps generating sensations making the person feel vulnerable. When the sensory world is off limits, many trauma survivors can turn to less helpful self-medicating behaviours such as compulsive eating, drinking and substance abuse.



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Mind & Environment

Body awareness puts us in touch with our inner being and the surrounding landscape. Simply noticing our annoyance, nervousness, or anxiety immediately helps us shift our perspective and opens up new options. Mindfulness puts us in touch with the transitory nature of our feelings and perceptions. When we pay focused attention to our bodily sensations, we can recognise the ebb and flow of our emotions, and with that, increase our control over them.

Become aware of your triggers, safe spaces and ways to process your trauma to stay mentally healthy.

Be kind to yourself and only take one step each day. Break down tasks into manageable timeframes. Seek support from mental health professional and loved ones.

Healing & processing

Re-setting nervous system

Deep breathing sends a message to the nervous system to calm down. Somatic vagus nerve healing is also emerging. Other ways to release nervous energy building up include laughing, dancing, floating, a cold shower, beach swim, tapping, drumming, singing or listening to your favourite music! Try a quiet cuppa in nature, writing in a journal or a good yarn to complement these methods.

Research Resources Reach out

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