

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is a response to frightening or overwhelming events where physical or emotional survival is at risk. There are five main automatic survival responses:

Fight

Flight

Freeze

Flop

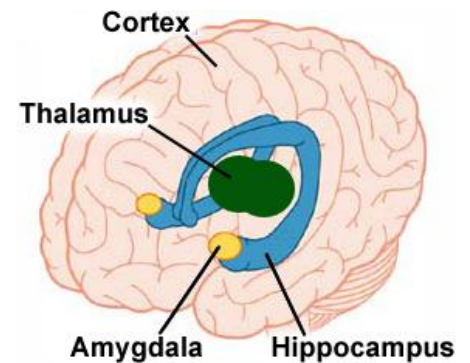
Fawn

The brain's role in trauma

Thalamus: The gatekeeper that filters incoming information and signals potential threat.

Amygdala: The brain's alarm system that activates fight, flight, freeze, flop, or fawn.

Hippocampus: The filing cabinet that stores and organises memories; helps calm the amygdala when danger has passed.



When the amygdala senses danger, it signals the release of **stress hormones**, including **adrenaline** and **cortisol**. These chemicals:

Increase heart rate and breathing

Tense muscles for action

Heighten alertness and reaction time

In trauma the amygdala often overrides the hippocampus:

Trauma memories aren't labelled with time or place, making them feel current.

Small triggers can provoke the five survival responses.

Your brain is responding as if you are still in danger, even if you're not.

Common mental health effects of trauma

FLASHBACKS	PANIC ATTACKS	DISSOCIATION	HYPERAROUSAL
HYPORAROUSAL	LOW SELF-ESTEEM	GRIEF	SELF-HARM
SUICIDAL FEELINGS	ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE	FEELINGS OF SELF-BLAME	SLEEP PROBLEMS

Day-to-day difficulties

You might find you have difficulty with day-to-day aspects of your life, including:

HOLDING DOWN A JOB	TRUSTING OTHERS	MAINTAINING FRIENDSHIPS OR RELATIONSHIPS	REMEMBERING THINGS
HAVING SEX OR EXPERIENCING A SEX DRIVE	COPING WITH CHANGE	SIMPLY ENJOYING YOUR LEISURE TIME	MAKING DECISIONS

How counselling can help

Counselling helps reconnect the thinking brain with the emotional and physical parts that carry trauma. In a safe, supportive space, you can help make sense of your story and rebuild a sense of safety and connection

Some simple tips and techniques if you're...

HAVING FLASHBACKS

Remind yourself: I am safe now	Hold or touch a present-day object	Describe your surroundings out loud	Count items by type or colour	5 senses grounding technique
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HAVING PANIC ATTACKS

Breathe slowly, counting to five in and out	Stamp your feet on the ground	Suck on mint gum or sweets	Touch or cuddle something soft
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FEELING DISSOCIATIVE OR SPACED OUT

Chew ginger or chili	Clap your hands and feel the sting	Drink a glass of ice-cold water	5 senses grounding technique
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FEELING ANXIOUS, FRIGHTENED, OR ON EDGE

Sip a hot drink mindfully – focus on taste, smell, mug shape	Take 10 deep breaths, count each one aloud	Write detailed observations of your surroundings	Take a warm bath or shower for soothing sensory input
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FEELING SAD, DEPRESSED, OR LONELY

Wrap up in a blanket and watch a favourite show	Write down negative thoughts and tear up the paper	Listen to uplifting music	Cuddle a pet or soft toy	Write a kind letter to your sad self
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YOU WANT TO SELF-HARM

Rub ice over the area you want to harm	Apply and remove tape or a plaster	Take a cold bath
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