

TRAUMAGRAM EXERCISE

OVERVIEW

The following exercise is to be used in conjunction with our book, “What Is PTSD? 3 Steps to Healing Trauma” for best effect. Please visit www.WhatIsPTSD.com for additional resources.

GOAL

Our goal with the *Traumagram Exercise* is to help visually illustrate generational traumas that may be affecting your ability to heal. Often the best way to understand what is happening is through visual engagement, or a *picture*. Genograms are used extensively in Family Systems Therapy to highlight the relationships between family members along with significant events that have taken place within the family (the *system*) that have affected behavior, sometimes over generations. A Traumagram focuses on the traumatic events that occurred throughout the generations. Our families of origin – that is, the families into which we are born or raised – can also have a big impact on what is happening to us today. We will begin with a sample of Charlie’s Traumagram so you have a sense of the steps to take. We hope you will see how trauma, particularly unresolved, suffered by any family member, can impact generations to come.

In resolving your trauma, it can be very helpful to recognize that trauma can and often does go through the generations. For an interesting video on this, visit the “doctorbaran” YouTube channel in the Trauma and Biology section and select the “The Ghost in your Genes” video.

TIME OUT

Always reflect on your inner state and notice if you need a break from the exercise to find your inner calm.

MATERIALS AND LAYOUT

Pen or pencil and the form we have provided on the following pages.

CHARLIE’S SAMPLE TRAUMAGRAM LIST

| Family Member | When it happened? | How they relate to family and me? | How it impacts me? |
|---------------|--|--|--|
| Mother | Age 8; Mother severely injured and nearly died as a result of an accident | Mom has always been supportive but is always overly cautious with me and everyone in the family. She argues a lot with my sister about this. | I see that my Mom is stressed and I try to keep her from worrying. I get angry with my sister for arguing. |
| Father | Age 14; became disabled as the result of a stroke during a surgical procedure; was forced to learn how to walk and talk again. | Dad is always careful and moves slowly. Everyone seems to be concerned about his health. He is a kind man. | I’m always concerned that Dad will get sick again. It scares me still. |
| Grandmother | 1940; Grandma was in London during the bombing blitz. She still cries when she remembers it. | Mom and Grandma argue especially when Grandma gets upset. Grandma is really nice but can be difficult when she gets upset. | I tend to leave the room when Mom and Grandma argue or when she is upset. Maybe avoidance keeps me from getting close to others. |
| Sister | Age 22; admitted to the family that her marriage was ending and her husband was abusive. | Seeing as her troubled marriage has been a source of conflict with everyone in the family, we were all relieved when she ended it. | I feel uncertain about my choices in relationships. |

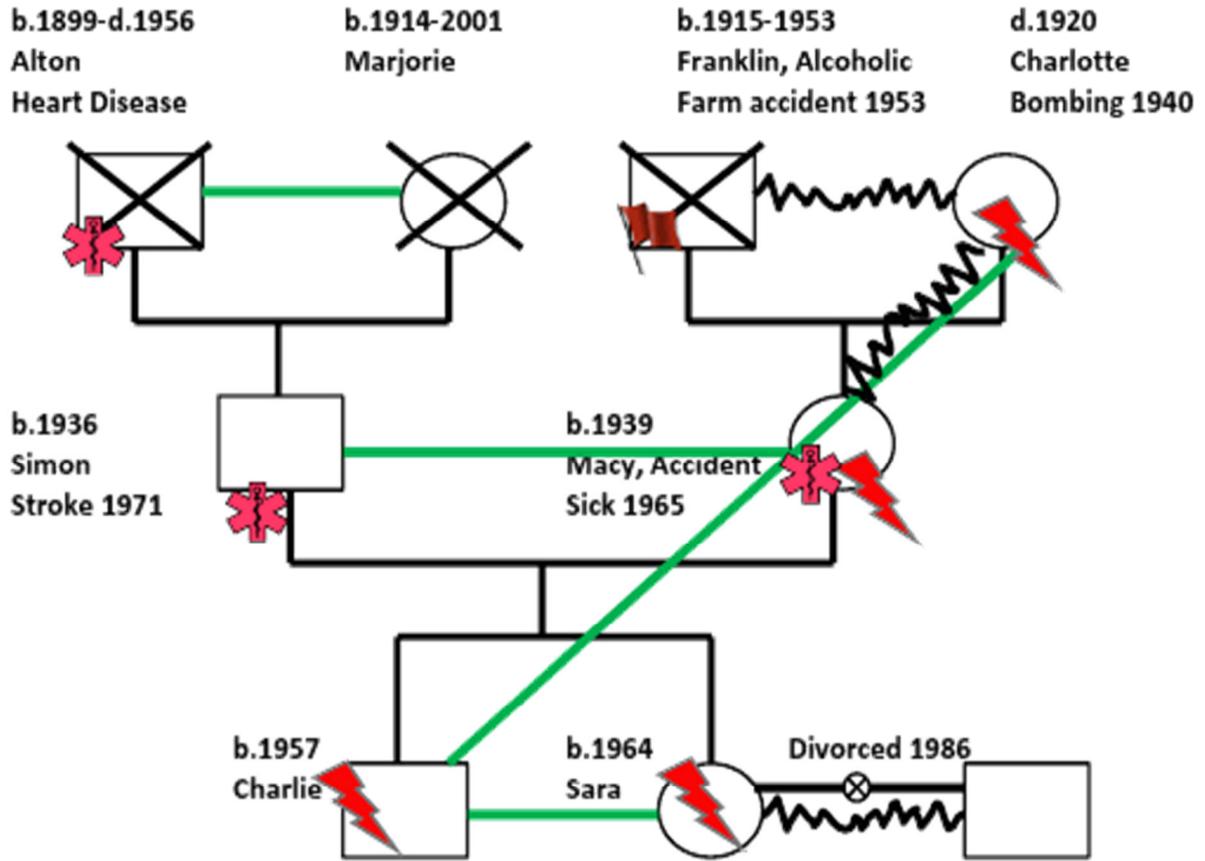
PATH TO COMPLETE

1. Begin by filling out a Traumagram List for your family, based on the knowledge you have. Focus on any trauma that may have occurred during the past several generations including accidents, violence, war, health traumas, etc. Try to go back several generations if possible.
2. Similar to your *Event List*, write one-sentence, simple descriptions of no more than ten words. This includes a timeline (age, year, general time frame) and a context (in the kitchen, in Afghanistan, etc.). Write just enough to document the trauma experienced by each close family member.
3. Complete the sections as required by year of occurrence or your age at the time of the event. Like in the *Event List*, you can see there is not enough information to know the whole story or even to evoke all of the worst details. Again, it is a snapshot that captures a story so we can begin to see family patterns emerge.
4. Begin your list. Be sure to remind yourself to stop in order to *Pace* your exposure and intensity whenever things feel over-whelming. This *Pacing* gives you the opportunity to practice managing your symptoms with the self-soothing techniques you have learned. This helps you gain confidence in your ability to manage your symptoms.
5. Add as many family incidents as you wish to each section until you feel your *Family Traumagram List* is complete and we can begin your Traumagram.
6. Using the symbol system below, prepare your Traumagram showing the type of relationship each member has with each other.

On the following pages, you will see a sample of Charlie's Family Trauma-gram based upon the completed Traumagram List above, along with legends specific to his relationships and the incidents that helped shape his family dynamics. The Traumagram has been simplified and does not include all family members (i.e., Aunts, Uncles, siblings, and offspring). For your own Traumagram, we encourage you to add all the people in your family.

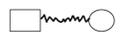
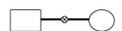
You will notice that in the sample, we do not have exact dates for births or deaths, etc. That is sufficient, as a general age or timeframe is enough for this exercise. You do not need exact dates. However, it is important to note what has occurred to each member of your family and to recognize the conflicts and behavioral patterns in a visual form as shown below. Now you can follow the steps to create your own family Traumagram.

Charlie's Family Traumagram



Legends Used in Charlie's Family Traumagram

Traumagram Relationship & Symbol Legend

-   Male / Female
-  Close / Healthy
-  Violent / Abuse / Troubled
-  Estranged / Cutoff
-   Death

Use the following symbols for your Traumagram as needed

-  Addictions
-  Mental Health Issues
-  Suicide
-  Medical Health Problems
-  Traumatized
- b.** Born
- d.** Died