

EVENT LIST 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

The goal of the *Event List Exercise* is to help you to create a list of unresolved life experiences that continue to feel disturbing, upsetting, and traumatic. This lays the foundation of your work through the subsequent exercises to your ultimate goal of remembering your trauma and telling your story.

This exercise also helps you enhance your physical, emotional, and cognitive (thinking) skills and to gain awareness of, and extinguish, the events that are continually causing you anxiety.

In this exercise, you will be reviewing your life chronologically, with short, simple descriptions, starting with your birth to the present. We have provided a sample Event List below for you to review prior to filling in your own.

So, let us look at *how* you can work through your memories, as well as the core beliefs that have been established as a result of your pivotal life experiences using the accompanying forms.

First, we need to remember our Subjective Units of Distress (SUD’s) rating scale. You will need to rate each of the Events, based on this scale, to help you follow your progress. As mentioned earlier, SUD’s describes a feeling of distress where 1 = feeling calm, 5 = some upset but I can handle it, and 10 = the worst feelings of distress; I feel out of control.

TIMEOUT

As with all the exercises presented in “*What Is PTSD?*” take the time to stop and reflect, or take a time-out, if the feelings of discomfort become too intense when working on the memories for this list. Remember that *Pacing* is one of the tools that we always encourage you to use. This helps you gauge the intensity of your feelings and the duration of exposure to your traumatic events, allowing you to feel more in control. You may choose any of the exercises practiced earlier or simply read something pleasant, call a friend, take a walk, or refocus your attention until you are able to return to the Event List Exercise.

MATERIALS AND LAYOUT

Pen or pencil, a quiet space, time, and the form provided on the following pages.

Robert’s *Event List*, which appears on the following page, is a good example of how to fill out the form:

ROBERT’S SAMPLE EVENT LIST

Life Stage	Event List	SUD’s
Early Childhood	Age 7, in the kitchen at home, Dad beat up Mom and I ran into the closet	7
Middle Childhood to Adolescent	Age 14, driving to the cottage with parents; head on collision; left sister severely injured.	8
Young Adulthood	Age 22, deployed to Afghanistan; watched a vehicle in front hit an “Improvised Explosive Devise” (IED)	10
Adulthood to Present	Age 22, first Panic Attack at the airport, after returning from Afghanistan.	8

We hope that by seeing Robert’s *Event List*, you will have a good idea of how this works and be inspired to take your next Step with the following exercise.

THEMES

Once you have created your Event List, reflect again on all of the items on the list to identify any guiding principles, themes, or threads that weave those memories together and make them seem familiar in your life. These memories may take the form of negative beliefs (i.e., “I’m not loveable” “the world is not safe” etc.). These are the operating principles that you’ve established about the world around you and that influence how you act in your world. These themes have a fundamental impact on how you live your life. If everyone you encounter is viewed from a perspective of “*I am not safe*”, it will have a significant impact on how your interaction proceeds and what you get out of any potential interpersonal exchange. Having a childhood memory of being terribly mistreated can determine how you interact with a new person resulting in a sensation of remaining very stressed and chronically isolated. Learning about themes can help you challenge life-long behavior patterns and habits. Now that you have a sense of the Events that evoke or trigger certain emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, you are better able to determine *when* you need to self-soothe.

Read through your Event List again and ask yourself, “What are my themes?”

While these events are fresh in your mind, let us introduce you to the Traumagram Exercise in the following pages. We encourage you to transfer these events as well as those of your family members’ into a family Traumagram. The Traumagram will provide you with a visual representation of trauma in your family history. It may help you gain a better understanding of your family as well as the influences that shaped them and ultimately shaped you. Gaining this type of insight into not only your history but the history of your family of origin may help explain patterns of behavior and thought that reach up through the generations. This depth of personal learning can move you deeply into restructuring the life you are living so that you can move into the life that you want.

PATH TO COMPLETE

1. As you are reading “Path to Complete,” please reference the *Event List* form on the following page.
2. Write one-sentence, simple descriptions of no more than ten words. This includes a timeline (age, year, and general time frame), and a context (in the kitchen, in Afghanistan, etc.) Write just enough to recall the traumatic memory without going into great detail, as that will come later. As you can see, the Event List is broken down into age groups. However, you can start wherever you need to and you will find that you may have many events at one point of life and none in others, or only one major event while others are scattered throughout the timeline.
3. Complete the sections as required by your age and experiences. An example of a sentence might be: “I was 12 years old when, in front of my family home while crossing the street, I was knocked down by a boy on a skateboard.” The most important thing to keep in mind when writing out the Event List is that you DO NOT NEED ALL THE DETAILS. Only include as much as you need to recall the Event. This is a very important part of the instruction. As you can see from the example above there is not enough information there to know the whole story or even to evoke all of the worst details. It is a snapshot that captures only a slice of the story but not enough to fully ignite it.
4. Begin your list. Be sure to remind yourself to stop in order to *pace* your exposure and intensity whenever it feels over-whelming. This *Pacing* gives you the opportunity to practice managing your symptoms with the self-soothing techniques you have learned. This helps to gain confidence in your ability to manage your symptoms.
5. Once your list is complete, read all the memories again, this time reflecting on them by assigning them an SUD (Subjective Units of Distress Scale) rating based on the following scale. This rating should represent your current feelings of distress as you look back on the event. Recognize that some of your memories will feel as bad as they did at the time, and others will have been resolved somewhat over time. That’s okay though; every step you make in your recovery, no matter how small it seems, is a triumph! Again, the SUD rating from 1 – 10 is as follows: 1 = a calm state; 5 = discomfort but manageable; and 10 = the worst you can recall.
6. Choose the number from one to ten that best reflects your feeling of discomfort as you recall the traumatic event. Remember, unresolved memories can ignite, making you feel as terrible as they did at the time by simply deeply reflecting on them. So, just notice how ignitable the memory is right now and this is your SUD number. Most of the ignitability is felt in your body with heart-rate, breathing, body tension, fearful and anxious feelings and thoughts.
7. Add as many memories as you wish to each section until you feel your *Event List* is complete.

EVENT LIST FORM

Life Stage	Event List	SUD's
Early Childhood		
Middle Childhood to Adolescent		
Young Adulthood		
Adulthood to Present		