



25 Tips after Trauma

(Baranowsky, April 2013)

HELPING YOU RECOVER AFTER TRAUMA
WHAT IS PTSD? 3 STEPS FOR HEALING TRAUMA (Baranowsky & Lauer, 2012)

TRAUMA TREATMENT: ONLINE COACH
<http://www.whatisptsd.com>

TRAUMATOLOGY INSTITUTE –TRAINING & SERVICE AFTER TRAUMA



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We have been offering care and training after trauma since 1999. In our work we hear from many survivors and professionals who want simple tips for dealing with the impact of trauma—right now. Seems reasonable! Here are just a few that we have gathered. Remember, everyone is different so use whatever seems to fit you and try out some that you are not sure about, you might be surprised.

After spending the past two weeks consulting with a policing organization around a violent incident in the community, it seems apparent that we can all be impacted. In order to do our best after trauma we need to use every healthy option to help deal with the discomfort and pain of trauma. We hope that this list will make a small difference in your trauma recovery.

Learning to become resilient in response to trauma requires a daily approach that allows us to replenish and find our own core of calm in the storm.

Sometimes it can feel like harnessing wild horses, especially when we feel all the physiological symptoms that go along with post-trauma response (i.e., rapid heart rate; shallow breathing; sweating; tension in our bodies).

This list is not meant to be a substitute for skilled trauma therapy just a supplement.

TIPS for Trauma Recovery:

- 1) While working through your trauma, it is paramount to recognize that you are not alone. Many people have experienced trauma (up to 70% over the course of a lifetime). You are in the company of many good people who find ways to manage and recover from trauma.
- 2) When recovering from trauma, be careful to minimize exposure to disturbing images or messages such as news or TV programs with a violent or traumatic theme.
- 3) If you are not recovering seek advice from a professional. It is important to work through the impact of trauma with a professional who has specialized training in trauma informed care and practices. The right help can help you find the light at the end of the tunnel. Whether it is a doctor or therapist, they are all devoted to helping you through this.
- 4) Know that medication will only do so much. While it can be helpful to level you out and provide the necessary time to determine your healing path, it will not be the only step to overcoming your trauma. There are lots to choose from and even if you find the right one, it takes time to kick in. Work alongside your doctor to create the best route.
- 5) Re-explore old hobbies and passions. Pick up a pencil, grasp a paintbrush, join a choir, or partake in any number of activities that either have brought you joy in the past or are something you've always wanted to try. Creativity and the arts can be your bright light through a difficult time, so utilize them to your best advantage.

- 6) Eat nutritious, small and regular meals. If you're struggling with meals, find foods that you'd like to eat. Stray away from unhealthy fast foods and replace them with fruits, vegetables and almonds (or other nuts) and doing #9 for 15 minutes. Constantly fluctuating blood sugar is going to make you feel worse. Find a healthy balance to help stabilize your body.
- 7) While doing #3 and #4, get some blood work done. Aside from medication levels, it can tell you about vitamins, minerals and hormones which contribute to your overall mood and energy. Many of these things can be regulated and increased with proper nutritious eating habits. (Re: #6). Help your health care practitioners help you with post-traumatic recovery.
- 8) If you are having trouble sleeping, try to write out your thoughts; read a book that focuses on relaxation/self-help/personal growth; watch a relaxation DVD or exercise from Youtube (there are many to choose from); listen to a calming audiobook or classical music. Focus on calming your mind and try #9. Also, switch your coffee for herbal tea, and resist caffeine in its many forms.
- 9) Begin meditating. Find a comfortable position to sit in and focus on your breathing. Learn the "3-6 Breathing" Exercise from the "doctorbaran" Channel on Youtube. While doing this, let go of your "to-do lists" and learn to be present body instead of running circles in your mind. While it does not replace sleep, it will provide some respite and recharge your batteries.
- 10) Try to face a window throughout your day whether at work, home, or when travelling from one place to another. Watch the world continue and recognize that even though struggles might have you stuck, life goes on. Find something interesting to focus on and let your mind wander while you allow yourself to relax. When looking at the people out there, remember that 70% of them have experienced a trauma in their lifetime and may have felt the way you do at one time or another – life can be challenging – it is part of the human condition.
- 11) When stress builds up, it is normal and important to find a healthy release. Take some deep breaths, talk about it to someone supporting you like a doctor or a friend, or family member. Cry if this helps. It is normal to experience the full range of emotions and having a healthy release helps us move on.
- 12) It is important to remember that people in your life will likely be trying to help you, but might not always know the right way to do this. Everyone is different and what might work for one person might actually make you feel worse. Do not blame them for not knowing how to handle your feelings or for offering poor advice. Instead you might want to seek out someone who is trained to understand trauma response and can help you make sense of your experiences. It is good to rely on your support network during stressful and hard times (such as #11), but if their advice doesn't work for you or makes you feel worse, do not take it to heart. Everyone is different.
- 13) Keeping a close support network is vital for recovery, but there are individuals who may drain your energy. There is nothing wrong with saying no and taking a break when you've had too much to deal with. Make sure that you schedule some time for yourself.

14) It is important to recognize that everyone has their own struggles. While not all of them may have experienced trauma, there are many other struggles in life which can build up. You are not alone with your trauma, just as you are not alone with your troubles.

15) The old Buddhist saying “let go or be dragged down” is very important for understanding your trauma. While something may have happened to you, you do not need to let the trauma dictate how your life unfolds going forward. Letting go can be a difficult and painful process, but it will help you rise above. When you are feeling gripped by your stress, remember that letting go is often the hardest but most important step. When you find yourself unable to let go of something racing around in your mind – remind yourself that in letting go, your own freedom becomes available.

16) Overcoming your trauma can begin with simple things such as wearing clothing that you feel good in. You must believe in yourself and work toward improving the quality of your life. A little bit of confidence can go a long way. There is nothing wrong with showing the world your determination.

17) Laughter releases endorphins in your brain and can elevate your mood. When seeking out a movie or novel, find something uplifting. Fiction is designed to elicit emotion, so seek positive emotions.

18) Exercise is a key element of a healthy lifestyle. It can even be something as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or walking around the block. Exercise does not need to entail a detailed workout plan (even though working out is recommended). Choose something that you can start with today and build from there.

19) Do not let inner thoughts and self-doubt determine your mood. Rely on facts instead negative feelings. If you thinking negative things about your life or the world around you, ask yourself if this is based on reality or a negative thinking habit. Try to make things as simple and uncomplicated as possible.

20) If you are truly struggling, do not be afraid to reach out to sympathetic person. Expanding your support network is important as it keeps your perspective fresh and also provides respite for your daily go-to people. You want to have many avenues and outlets rather than few or scarce options. Reaching out to someone who is not necessarily your best friend, therapist, or doctor, may result in a surprising awareness and a new set of resources.

21) Forgive yourself. While these tips can help, you do not need to abide by them religiously. Even the best of us forget to eat our vegetables or meditate each day. The important thing is that you forgive yourself and then try again. Increasing our sense of self-compassion lowers anxiety and improves our mood.

22) Take care of those who are supportive of you. While it is important to rely on others, it is also important to allow them to rely on you when possible or to give them a well-deserved break. Taking care of each other and allowing for down-time is key. Compassion fatigue (or care-giver stress) is a reality.

23) Be honest with yourself. No one knows your body like you do. If you do not tell people about your symptoms and try to get the help you need when you need it, then you may be missing out on important strategies for recovery. Take responsibility for the healthy and well-being of your own body.

24) When we experience a significant traumatic event, it can make little events feel truly awful. The brain stores traumatic memories along with all the emotional and physical reactions that went along with the terrible moment. So if you notice that you are reacting very strongly to things that would have not bothered you before, this is likely a post-trauma response. This is a good indicator that it is time to settle down your body and mind. At times, we may feel unsafe even when there is nothing dangerous happening. Use this line “In this moment, I am Safe”. As you inhale say “I am” and as you exhale say “Relaxed”. Then completely let your breath go.

25) Your most important job in trauma recovery is learning about finding calm and relaxation. The body reacts very powerfully after trauma and handling this is a key to working through trauma and moving into recovery.

Begin your journey toward trauma recovery knowing that there are many people who can help and that many have travelled this same road.

Find every avenue toward the life you want to create and live. There are many things that can and will help if you stay open and willing to try new things.

While this list is not the panacea for your struggles, it is a good first step. These are merely things that you can do to help you get started on the journey ahead. The little things that you can change now can make a big difference in the future.

Wishing you a gentle journey,

Dr. Anna B. Baranowsky, Ph.D., C.Psych. & the TI Team

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