

# Trauma and Healing

These are things people need to know about trauma to heal quicker or prepare mentally or at least be aware that the process is known and trauma can be healed.

In other words it's good for people to know BEFORE actions and it's good to know AFTER actions. And it's good for people that are traumatized and it's good for people that are supporting.

**Causes of Trauma:** The brain works different than normal under severe threat and anxiety -it essentially 'scans' or 'photographs' EVERYTHING going on at the time. Sensory perceptions are stored in a different way in memory than under normal circumstance. Later, these perceptions become 'triggers' which cause the person to feel like they are back in the moment of trauma. Knowing what these triggers are is crucial to countering symptoms.

**Symptoms:** How do you know when you've healed? The symptoms are no longer present.

**Severe:** catatonic (speechless), black-out (memory loss), robotic action (mind control)

**Less severe:** flashbacks (remembering when you don't expect to), sleeplessness, irritability, quick to anger, listless, anger, limiting life choices (never dating again, never walking down alleys, never going to another demo), hopelessness, purposelessness, defeatist, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, nightmares, bad dreams

**Triage** (does not include physical wounds attend to physical wounds immediately):

The person is communicative and can explain in proper sequence to order of events

The person is impaired, crying, starts crying or shuts down when talking about events

The person is disassociative (does not know the day, identity, current events)

The person is noncommunicative or catatonic, cannot speak, glassy eyed

**Reasons for different reactions:** (extent of damage by shock)

- Depends on amount of support and quick placement into 'safe space'
- Creating safe spaces for people when they leave jail is VITAL -receive people leaving jail. This is a part of any action, so do not leave it out. (Note 'interviews' by media or 'interested parties' or 'supporters' can RE-Traumatize. Be very careful. Think about what it's like for a rape victim to go to the hospital and be interviewed by a cop it sucks. Be gentle, warm the person, feed the person, absolutely remove reminders of 'triggers' if the person can't handle it. If the person is triggered by long hair and you've got long hair, hide it, cut it, or get away. Keep the space open between the person and the door of the room you are in -do not thoughtlessly block a person's 'way out'.
- Depends on induced by person, government, state OR by forces of nature (fire, flood, earthquake)  
It is difficult to 'get back' at nature so the healing process is different based on cause of the trauma
- Depends on severity of event: Heard screams of torture, saw torture, and tortured are different levels of severity

Depends on previous experience with trauma: For example, if someone has been through 'tear gas' attack before that led to injury, a new round of 'tear gas' can trigger or add to the severity of the trauma felt.

## Stages:

I. **Shock**, induced by life threatening or perception of life threat or witnessing life threat

II. **Compensation** (anger or denial) can last decades or moments, it will be shorter if people know what's going on. Means the person is waiting for someone to do something or something to happen to someone before 'resolution' -this may mean someone is jailed or killed, or a house is rebuilt, or 'justice is done' Often people stay in this stage (men especially may not cry openly) and sometimes you may hear "I can't start crying because if I start I'll never stop" which people believe, but it turns out that they do eventually stop crying. It is important to know that healing does not begin with anyone else than the person needing to be healed.

III. **Mourning** (sadness) -acknowledging loss. Looks like crying, sounds like crying, is crying -essentially, we honestly acknowledge what we've lost. This can be done like "I lost me sense of safety in the universe", "my sense of justice", "my sense that the universe is fair", "my trust in humankind", "my trust in decency", "my faith in God", "my dignity", "my body safety", "my purity", "my trust in activists", "my trust of myself" -all of it, the more the better -if you are crying your eyes out you're healing.

IV. **Reconnection** healing. Studies show rape survivors and demilitarized soldiers that go on to recount their experience, help others cope, testify, etc. eventually loose symptoms. Reflection on events is 'boring' rather than emotional.

Relevance to demonstrating: (Prague, Seattle, etc?)

In comparison to rape, perpetrating mass murder, or other terrible things, street demonstration is relatively less traumatic -however trauma is very much an individual thing and people can be severely effected by imprisonment, gassing, beatings by police, betrayal, or even unexpected behavior by comrades or the state. We can mourn little things as well as big things and it's healthy and we should. Spending time in the "sad space" intentionally allows us to delve deeper into the things we need to heal and we can gradually recover memories that may have been blacked out in order to cope at an earlier stage in life. Many people, many activists were imprisoned or held captive or felt that way through childhood and schooling. There is much to mourn and it's healthy.