

## **A Few Words about Trauma and Our Work Together**

Many trauma reactions are natural reactions. It is not that there is something wrong with you. It is that the event or events that happened to you were terribly wrong.

Sometimes, however, natural trauma reactions become more chronic or increase in severity. The most common of these problems are depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Everyone with a trauma history experiences some of these symptoms sometimes. However, if you are experiencing a lot of them and you feel the symptoms most of the time every day, they will be addressed in your therapy. Some of the symptoms are briefly described below.

### **Common Symptoms of Depression**

**Feeling or appearing sad most of the time**

**Being uninterested in and unable to enjoy things that previously were pleasurable**

Significantly decreased or increased appetite that results in a 5% weight loss or gain in a month.

Unable to sleep much or sleeping much more than previously

Activity such as walking or getting up from a chair is slowed down

Tired and lacking in energy

Feeling worthless and guilty

Unable to concentrate and make decisions

Thinking about or wishing for death, even though a specific plan may not be developed

### **Common Symptoms of Anxiety**

Feeling restless, edgy, keyed up

Tired and lacking in energy

Unable to concentrate

Irritable

Increased muscle tension

Difficulty sleeping

### **Common Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress**

Common **Intrusive Symptoms** of Posttraumatic Stress

Intrusive, distressing thoughts and images about the event

Repeated, distressing dream about the event

Feeling as if the moment the Identity Theft became known or other aspects of it are happening all over again

Marked mental distress in reaction to cues that resemble aspects of the event (credit card ads on television, for example)

Physiological reactions to these cues (such as rapid heartbeat, elevated blood pressure)

## Common **Avoidance Symptoms** of Posttraumatic Stress

- Trying to avoid feelings, thoughts, or conversations about the event
- Trying to avoid activities, people, or places that recall the event
- Inability to recall important features of the event
- Being uninterested in and unable to enjoy things that previously were pleasurable
- Feeling detached or isolated from other people
- Experiencing restriction in ability to love or feel other strong emotions
- Feeling that life will be brief or unfulfilled

## Common **Physiological Symptoms** of Posttraumatic Stress

- Difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep
- Angry outbursts and irritability
- Poor concentration
- Excessive vigilance (always on guard for more difficulties)
- Increased startle reaction

## **Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

Many people who have a traumatic experience have experienced many of them previously rather than a single incident or event. These experiences include childhood physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, sex trafficking and other organized violence. Those with early, chronic life trauma are more likely to experience the symptoms of Complex Posttraumatic Stress in addition to those above.

In addition to the common symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress listed above, the following are common.

### **Common Symptoms of Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

- Emotional Regulation Difficulties (Feeling that stresses that others may find minor feel major to you, and you, therefore over-react to them. This can mean cutting, substance abuse, eating disorders, etc. as coping mechanisms)
- Relationship Problems (Difficulty making and keeping friends. Difficulties sustaining intimate relationships)
- Difficulties staying focused and paying attention (Sometimes going “off” to somewhere else in your mind)
- Having beliefs about things that are not rational
- Having physical aches and pains that physicians cannot explain; numerous negative findings on tests

## **Therapy**

While I will work with you on whatever is troubling you the most during any session, the general order of trauma therapy is as follows. We may or may not include all of these areas, depending on your needs.

- (1) Physical and Emotional Safety
- (2) Education about Trauma
- (3) Assessment (discussion of symptoms on the previous page)
- (4) Stabilization of Symptoms
- (5) Identification of strengths and resilience traits
- (6) Addition of case management if multiple environmental issues
- (7) Narration of your traumatic experiences (as you are comfortable talking about them)
- (8) Rational Thinking before Behavior
- (9) Relationship Skills
- (10) Making meaning of what happened that is incorporated into goals and plans for going on with your life

## **Two Practical Recommendations**

- (1) It is very important that you talk about what has happened to you not only with me but with a few other people you trust. You may be tempted to withdraw from them or to withdraw from therapy, but you are strongly encouraged to avoid isolation.**
- (2) Avoid using alcohol and other drugs or overdosing on prescribed medication to control your symptoms.** We will work together as a team to do everything healthy that we can to make you more comfortable.