What are “Triggers”?

You may be experiencing emotional and/or physical reactions, but don’t know why. You may be having these reactions related to “triggers”. A trigger is a piece of an event that intrudes into the present and reminds you of what happened in the past.

Triggers can be anything that reminds you of the event including, but not limited to:

- Smells
- Sights
- Sounds
- Weather
- Things people say
- Things people do
- Certain objects or situations

When confronted with a trigger, you may have physical symptoms such as:

- Racing heartbeat
- Sweaty palms
- Sinking stomach
- Sensitivity to touch
- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Confusion
- Flashbacks

(The above has been excerpted from “Coping With Trauma” by Mt. Carmel Crime & Trauma Assistance Program).

Experiencing triggers can be a “normal” reaction to the physical and emotional trauma you’ve been through. Triggers can be difficult to deal with and they may feel scary at times, but you are not alone in your experience. By identifying specific things that may lead to you being triggered (a scent, a model of car, etc.) we can work with you to come up with a plan both to try and minimize interactions with these potential triggers, as well as explore ways to cope with these triggers if they do arise.

We Can Help!

SARN advocates are available 24/7 to assist survivors in person at the hospital and/or with law enforcement following a sexual assault.

We can also help connect survivors to resources at HelpLine and in the community.

As SARN Advocates, we are specially trained to deal with issues surrounding trauma and the aftermath of sexual assault. We’re also available to assist friends or family members who have been affected by this event.

Our SARN Coordinator provides crisis intervention as well as long-term advocacy to those who’ve experienced sexual assault in order to help survivors deal with their trauma. This service can be in person, or over the phone, depending on what the survivor chooses. HelpLine also refers people to trauma-informed therapy and groups. Additionally we offer:

- A free monthly support group, “The Healing Circle,” which is open to Survivors of sexual assault and is offered in a safe and confidential space.
- An annual retreat and other Survivor-focused events and workshops dealing with trauma.
- Books and other materials that may be helpful.
- 24/7 free crisis intervention and information hotline.

“The SARN program was informative, encouraging, and empowering.” - Survivor

Even if the assault happened years ago, the SARN program at HelpLine can still help. Unfortunately, many survivors do not think they need help until months or years after the assault. Remember, it’s never too late to get help!

For More Information Call:
HelpLine dial 211 or 1.800.684.2324 (toll free)
Deaf and Hard of Hearing dial 711 or 1.800.750.0750

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What are “Triggers”?
What is trauma?

As Defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, trauma can be: “A disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.”

While each situation is unique, there are common patterns to dealing with a traumatic event.

- Traumatic events cause a crisis response in our brains which can last for a period of time (i.e. days to weeks). During this time, your brain is functioning differently and it is hard to think or act “like normal”.
- After this initial period, people often feel like their lives have been changed permanently. Some people decide to act as if the event didn’t occur, or may try to cope with the traumatic event on their own. Other people may seek help &/or speak with a friend, family member, advocate, or counselor.

Some physical & emotional symptoms of Trauma:

- Pounding heart, jumping heartbeat
- Nausea
- Nightmares
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Changes in eating habits
- Easily startled
- Repeated re-living of the traumatic event in memories
- Fear
- Irritability or Anxiety
- Guilt
- Feelings of low self-worth
- Feelings of self-blame
- Feeling numb...detached
- Spirituality: “why me?”...awareness of the fragility of life
- Anger/Rage at the assailant

(Excerpted from Coping With Trauma by Mt. Carmel Crime & Trauma Assistance Program. Please note that this is just a partial list).

What can help?

Getting trauma-informed therapy as soon as possible may help a person process what happened and minimize difficulties associated with it. Additionally, the following strategies may also be helpful:

- Speaking with supportive friends/family
- Getting physical exercise (e.g. walking)
- Journaling or writing about your experience
- Taking care of yourself, physically (e.g. eating well, exercising, and getting rest) - even if it’s difficult.
- Watch your consumption of either things that can stimulate you (e.g. coffee) or depress you (e.g. alcohol).

It’s okay to spend time doing things other than talking or thinking about the event. Find what works as a healthy distraction for you (reading, cooking with a new recipe, watching a movie, playing with a pet, cleaning, doing a crossword, taking part in aerobic exercise etc.).

Relaxing is important as well since it brings us into the present moment. Concentrating on your breathing is one way to do this. Inhale slowly and picture bringing fresh, healing energy into your body. When you exhale, picture all the tension and stress leaving your body. Do this until you feel grounded.

Other ideas to try and bring yourself into the present moment are: Eat a peppermint or tart candy, drink a glass of water, repeatedly toss a stress ball from left to right hand, type on a keyboard, hold an ice cube tightly in one hand, sing loudly, or repeat your name/date/location.

Call the free, confidential hotline at 211 or 1.800.684.2324