




RETRAUMATISATION

GUIDE





What is retraumatisation?

Retraumatisation is when someone relives the stress reactions they have previously been subjected to as a result of a traumatic event when confronted with a new, related event. It can feel as intense as when the first occasion occurred. As time goes on, many people do not realise that the stress they are experiencing is the result of the trauma they were subjected to earlier in life. It happens because a current experience is subconsciously associated with the original trauma, which unlocks past reactions and memories of the event, leading to distress and feelings of dread.

Triggering events

A triggering event is a circumstance that immediately reminds you, your family, or your community of a fear that was experienced during a past traumatic event.

Retraumatisation may occur when a triggering event happens, and you are reminded of past trauma you have been subjected to. An example of a triggering event is hearing a news story similar to one that you have gone through, for example reports of a sexual abuse.





Influencing factors for retraumatisation

- Having been subjected to trauma, such as abuse, for a long time
- Being emotionally isolated to the point where you do not feel loved or supported by family members, peers or other loved ones
- Living or working in unsafe, unstable environments, such as having neglectful parents
- Coping mechanisms, such as being in denial about past trauma and avoiding coming into contact with it and alcohol and drug abuse.
- Not having good economic or social support, for example the absence of health and mental health care

Signs of retraumatisation

Thoughts:

- Negative thoughts related to emotions felt when being subjected to past trauma
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Dissociation- becoming unaware of real life and disconnecting from what is happening right now





Physical signs:

- Feeling on edge, anxious and easily agitated
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Changes in appetite
- Fluctuations in weight
- Fatigue
- Experiencing physical reactions to trigger events, such as heart palpitations

Behaviours:

- Socially withdrawn, isolating yourself from others
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Avoiding people, places and occasions that remind you of the traumatic event

Emotions:

- Guilt
- Anger
- Fear
- Shame
- Feeling alone
- Feeling far away from everyone else
- Feeling numb
- Feeling unsafe







How to manage retraumatisation

Retraumatisation is not a sign of failure or the healing process not working. It is understandable to feel frustrated years after the traumatic event has occurred, as it may feel as though 'it should be over by now'.

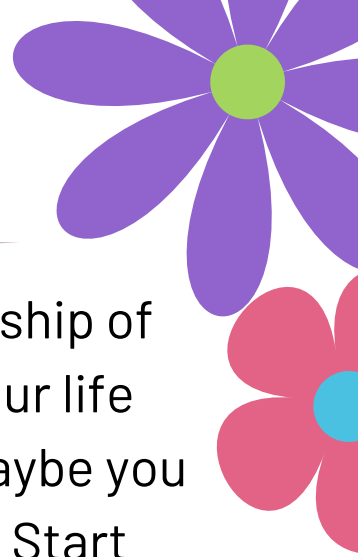
However, retraumatisation is a normal part of recovery. You will go back to that original place in your mind quite frequently at first, but as time passes, and you show yourself grace and give yourself the space to feel every emotion you want to feel, you will find yourself on the other side of the trauma.

It may feel like you are digging around in an old wound when your mind takes you back to that place.

Nevertheless, stay calm and believe that you have the strength and bravery to recover from the pain you have been subjected to.

Lean back on your support system and let them know if you are struggling. You have loved ones around you who care deeply about you, even though it may not feel like that sometimes.





Practise self-care regularly and take back ownership of your story. Do things you enjoy and start living your life for yourself. Devote time to your hobbies that maybe you never spent time doing before. Learn a new skill. Start exercising regularly to challenge your brain and build resiliency. If you start doing yoga, start with the easiest yoga pose first and gradually build up the difficulty of the moves you are doing and turn it into a game where you keep trying to win.

Spend time with yourself and get to know yourself. You have always been you and that will never change. The event did not take anything away from you. Start journaling and putting pen to paper to narrate your own story.

You may feel discouraged at first, but you must decide to take the first steps to returning to a content and happy life. You will carry your trauma with you, but you will grow around it, and learn new ways to manage the triggers and stress reactions. Be patient with yourself and understand that life will get better.





Healing isn't walking away, isn't hiding,
There is so much desire to let it go but
it's impossible to let go of something
that inhabits your body.

You must see it through.

You must nurture it, look at it from all
sides and say,

'You are within me,
But you are not me'

