

## Complex Trauma

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In adult life everyone struggles to some extent, sometimes traumatically, but for many of us this also occurs at the developmentally vulnerable time of childhood. When this involves a repeated loss or abuse of trust, we have a situation of *complex trauma*.

Complex trauma develops when a child's natural strivings towards connection are thwarted or manipulated, through emotional, sexual, or physical abuse, loss or neglect. This can affect the developing brain and 'sense of self', which in turn impacts upon later decision-making.

This tragic state of affairs is very common, some estimates are as high as two in three affected adults of both sexes, and is something to be borne in mind in our daily dealings with one another, and within our institutions.

The human spirit is remarkable in its resilience, and 'survivors' often demonstrate coping strategies to get by. For example, disconnecting from what's happening. However they are limited by the damage done to their systems, and the fact that the strategies which assist survival in childhood, may become obstacles to flourishing in later life.

Relationships can be affected. For example, where someone without realising it gives up on themselves and identifies as powerless, or even defends against it by becoming abusive. This is because the relationship to oneself has been affected, and requires repair.

In an effort to try and make sense of traumatic experience, the developing mind may begin to view itself and others unrealistically. For example it is common for survivors to carry shame and responsibility for the harm done to them, rather than leave it with those to whom it belongs.

Often physical and mental problems are associated with complex trauma, including stomach complaints, head-aches, and memory blanks, and may attract a medical diagnosis. Underlying complex trauma is behind many psychiatric disorders, and addictions.

Anxiety is often very high in affected individuals, who may not be aware of this. Simply recognising its existence and attending to it will help off-set a highly strung state of mind. 'Grounding' the body in the present moment, approaching one-self gently and deliberately keeping stimuli low, will help settle and sooth an over-activated system.

For those seeking professional assistance, supportive psychotherapy is often cited as helpful. For those unable to see someone in person, the organisation Blue Knot Foundation can be provide support and can be found online.

If you are a survivor of complex trauma you have done well to get this far, and whatever your intended pathway to health, you will benefit from nurturing yourself.