

WHAT IS TRAUMA?



TRAUMA is an occurrence wherein an individual see or experiences a risk to their own life or safety of that of other people and feels terror, fear, or helplessness. The occurrence might additionally cause confusion, dissociation, and a loss of a feeling of security. Trauma occurrences test a person's observation of the world as a secure, just, and predictable place. (Psychology Dictionary Online)

COMPLEX TRAUMA is a psychological disorder that occurs when an individual experiences events and experiences as stressors that are:

1. Repetitive, prolonged, or cumulative
2. Interpersonal in nature, involving direct harm, exploitation, and maltreatment-- This type of maltreatment usually includes neglect, abandonment, or aversion by primary caregivers or seemingly responsible and trustworthy adults.
3. Occurring during developmentally vulnerable times in a victim's life-- These developmentally vulnerable times usually include early childhood and adolescence. However, complex trauma may also take place later in life or within conditions of vulnerability associated with disability, disempowerment, dependency, age, sickness, or others.

(Dr. Christine Courtois)

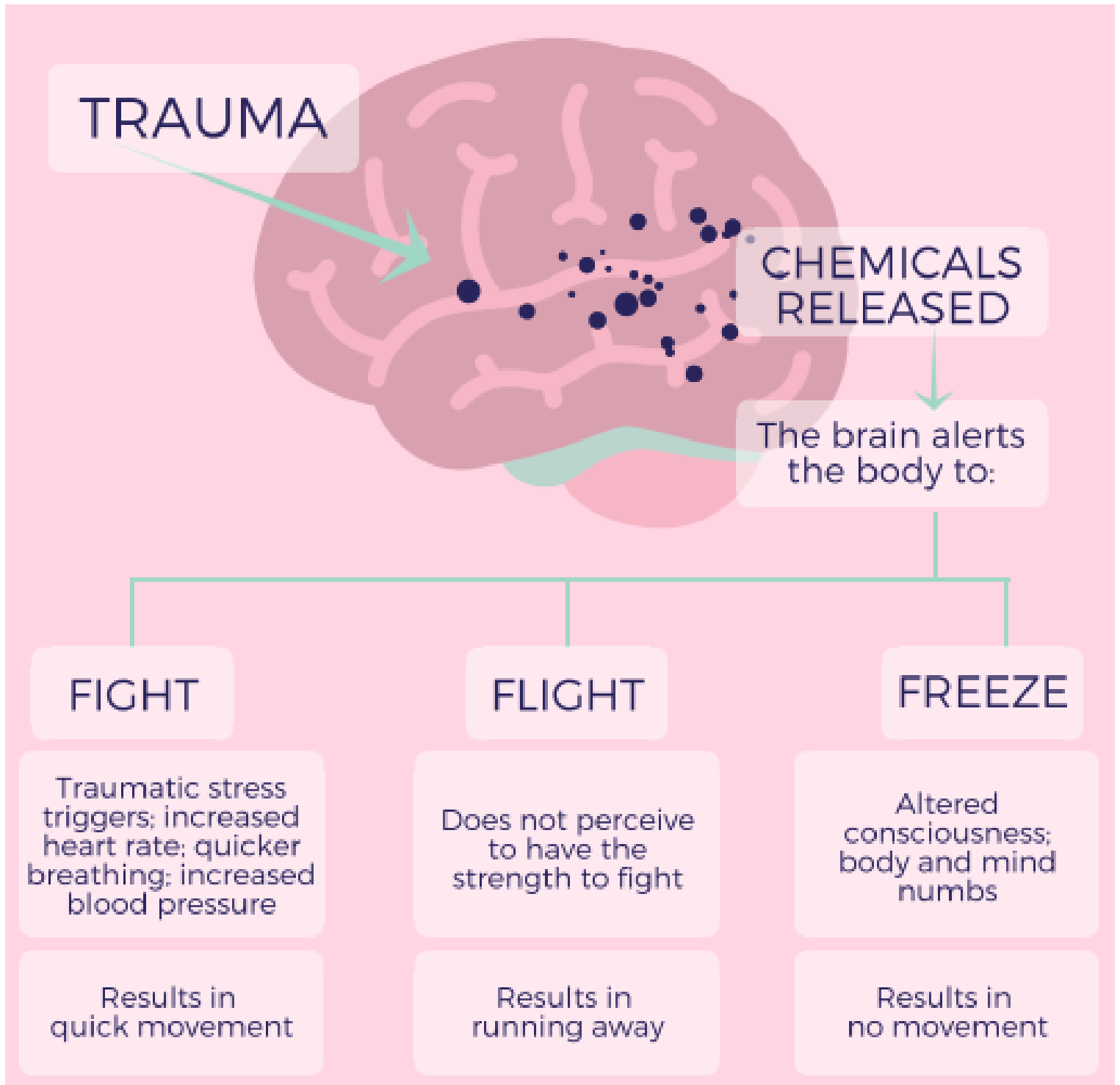


Trauma experienced by youth who are exploited is considered Complex Trauma because of their exposure to multiple traumatic events which is often of an invasive, interpersonal nature and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure.

Each child has unique psychological resources and vulnerabilities that influence their responses to traumatic victimization.

Early exposure to trauma and abuse, unmet mental health needs prior to exploitation, and developmental factors add to the complexity of identifying and treatment for exploited children.

[1] Basson, D., Langs, J., Acker, K., Katz, S., Desai, N., & Ford, J. (2018). Psychotherapy for commercially sexually exploited children: A guide for community-based behavioral health practitioners and agencies. West Coast Children's Clinic. 12-13.



Common Reactions to a Traumatic Event:

PHYSICAL

- Fight, Flight, or Freeze
- Shock, numbness
- Nausea
- Exhaustion
- Muscle Tremors, shakes, or aches
- Twitches
- Chest pain
- Fast pulse
- Rapid heart rate
- Headaches
- Weakness, fatigue
- Dizziness
- Sweating
- Elevated blood pressure
- Chills
- Trouble sleeping
- Excessive sleeping
- Diarrhea
- Digestive problems
- Stomachache
- Dry mouth
- Non-specific body complaints

COGNITIVE

- Blaming
- Confusion
- Poor attention
- Poor decisions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Hyper-vigilant
- Nightmares
- Intrusive images
- Poor problem solving
- Difficulty calculating
- Difficulty identifying objects/people
- Difficulty remembering details
- Time distortion
- Auditory distortion
- Sense that things are not real
- Flashbacks
- Preoccupation with event

EMOTIONAL

- Anxiety
- Crying
- Guilt/Survivor Guilt
- Numbing
- Shame
- Feeling unsafe
- Grief
- Disbelief
- Denial
- Panic/Startle response
- Emotional shock
- Uncertainty
- Depression symptoms
- Apprehension
- Irritability/Agitation
- Anger/Outbursts
- Loss of emotional control
- Euphoria
- Obsessiveness
- Moodiness
- Helplessness
- Meaninglessness

RELATIONAL

- Withdrawal from family, coworkers, colleagues
- Withdrawal from organizations/affiliations
- Isolation
- Stigma, racism, sexism, media response
- Secondary injuries from friends, family, social & professional affiliations contribute to additional stress
- Unemployment or underemployment
- Discontinued educational pursuits
- Lack of community or political involvement
- Withdrawal from activities/interests

BEHAVIORAL

- Change in speech
- Withdrawal
- Emotional outbursts
- Accident prone
- Potential for violence
- Suspiciousness
- Loss/increase of appetite
- Startle reaction
- Alcohol/drug consumption
- Inability to rest
- Pacing
- Change in sexual function/drive
- Crying
- Recklessness
- Hyper-alert to environment
- Ritualistic behavior
- Criminal behavior
- Loss of motivation
- Excessive spending

SPIRITUAL

- Questions about faith
- Run to or from God
- Anger at God
- Vulnerability and mortality
- Withdraw from faith and religion
- Concern about hereafter
- Questions about good/evil
- Questioning God
- Redefining moral values
- Promising, bargaining & challenging God during times of duress or trauma
- Searching for meaning and hope
- Concern about vengeance, justice, and forgiveness
- Spiritual “awakening”