

# **Anger and Trauma**

Anger is an unpleasant emotion. Some people feel like they're constantly angry because of the trauma they've experienced. But, despite how scary anger can feel, it's actually an important part of trauma recovery.

Whether trauma has its origins in early childhood, is associated with a loss, or is a part of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it is often a major side effect of the trauma itself and the process of recovering from it. Anger and trauma are deeply linked, but anger can provide the path to freedom from trauma.

## **Anger as a Survival Mechanism**

Experiencing trauma is overwhelming. Regardless of the trauma source, most people feel like they did not deserve what happened to them. Someone they trusted should have protected them and failed to do so. Or the car crash or medical complications shouldn't have happened. When that trust is broken, anger is a natural outcome. It is both psychologically normal and self-protective.

After trauma, we try to protect ourselves in any way possible from experiencing a similar event in the future. The problem is, many people get stuck in "fight or flight" mode. This state of high alert is what we call arousal: we are always watching for the next big threat.

## **Symptoms of Anger after Experiencing Trauma**

Anger changes the way the body feels. You can tell because all your muscles tense, your heart beats faster, and you may feel constantly on edge. For some people, anger becomes chronic and takes a significant toll on their physical and mental health. You may get in more fights and it may damage your relationships.

It is exhausting to feel like you're constantly on high alert, watching out for the next potential threat. It's hard on the people around you, too, because you're often reacting to perceived threats that may not actually be there.

### **The Issue of Personal Boundaries**

Most survivors of trauma experience violations of their personal boundaries. Whether they were victims of childhood abuse, sexual abuse, or domestic violence, the right to personal safety was not respected. A similar violation of boundaries occurs when a car unexpectedly crashes into yours. As a result, many people who experienced trauma find it difficult to set boundaries that allow them to feel appropriately safe and respected.

This occurs even when victims are trying to establish boundaries with people other than those who originally hurt them. Victims of car accidents lose their ability to feel safe on the road again. This inability to feel safe leads to more anger. This feeds the cycle of anger and trauma.

### **Hope for Healing**

Even though anger and trauma are linked in many cases, it doesn't have to be this way. Anger is the first step toward healing, if you use it to acknowledge that something bad happened to you. The important thing is not to remain stuck there.

Fortunately, recovery from trauma is possible once you work through the anger and learn to manage your triggers. Here are some of key ways you can recover from anger and trauma:

**Learn to relax.** Particularly for people who have experienced significant trauma, relaxation may not come easily. It's a skill that has to be learned. Meditation, exercise, and deep breathing, spending time in nature, as

well as learning ways to gain a broader perspective on your situation, can all help you learn to calm that fight-or-flight reaction.

**Find new ways to deal with stress.** Most people who have experienced trauma need help to find strategies for coping with the difficult experiences they faced. Taking a break when you're stressed, writing about your feelings in a journal or talking to a friend or loved one about your feelings can all help.

**Change your thought patterns.** There's no question that trauma changes the brain. Depending on how early in life these traumatic experiences occurred, they may be strongly imprinted on your thought processes. You can train yourself to react differently to situations in which you feel out of control. A qualified therapist can help to role-play scenarios in which you respond in a new way. example, you might be able to say, "I'm still safe even if others don't react the way I want."

Working through anger and trauma is an important and difficult task. But healing is possible when you make the effort to get better and find someone to help you through the process.