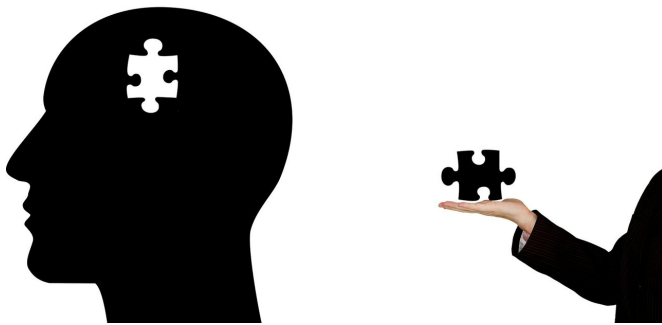


What is trauma therapy, and could it help me?

26 September 2019, by Erin McCarthy



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Elise Wakeland works with trauma survivors every day. The therapist's work is difficult, she said, but it's rewarding, too.

She wishes that everyone could see the resilience of patients who walk into her Center City practice, Wakeland Psychotherapy. If they did, she said, perhaps they would "show up" for the [trauma](#) survivors in their own lives, by asking about what happened, checking in, or just saying "I'm here for you."

"Generally society has a really hard time holding space for people who have been through [traumatic events](#) and that perpetuates avoidance," Wakeland said. "It takes confronting trauma to heal from trauma."

Most Americans will experience trauma at least once in their lives, research shows. The trauma can be rooted in a [sexual assault](#), a [car accident](#), a natural disaster, an abusive relationship, military combat, or any other event or series of events.

Most people who have experienced trauma never get professional help, which increases their risk of developing a number of physical and [mental health](#)

[conditions](#), according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

What Is Trauma Therapy?

Trauma [therapy](#) is a broad term for therapy with a mental-health professional who is educated on the short- and long-term impacts of trauma.

Kathleen McBeth specializes in a type of trauma therapy called Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) at Cornerstone Therapy and Wellness in Malvern and Wayne.

In the same way a cardiologist is better equipped than a general practitioner to advise you on a heart condition, a trauma therapist can better help you heal from trauma than other kinds of therapists, she said.

During EMDR, the patient thinks about the trauma while listening to music or tapping noises, or watching the therapist's hand movements. The idea, McBeth said, is to process the memory while you're paying attention to something else, therefore separating the memory from the emotional response.

Other types of trauma therapy include prolonged exposure therapy, which can help patients who've avoided reminders of a traumatic event; cognitive behavior therapy, which can help people who experienced trauma as a child; and talk therapy with a professional who has trauma certification.

Who Can Be Helped By Trauma Therapy?

"Really anybody who's gone through an adverse event that has impacted their life," said Wakeland, who specializes in sexual trauma.

Many people have experienced trauma but don't recognize it, McBeth added.

"They'll say, "Oh, it was just a dog bite. That was, like, years ago," " she said. Others may have witnessed a terrible accident, she said, and think they couldn't be traumatized because they weren't directly involved or don't bear physical scars.

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But if recurring memories of an event or series of events are having an impact on daily life, trauma therapy could help, she said.

"Anybody who is carrying around something" should seek professional help, said Billie Lee Orenbuch, who specializes in EMDR at Collaborative Care of Bala in Bala Cynwyd. "If they think about the incident, if they still have an emotional response, they need therapy."

What Is The Goal Of Trauma Therapy?

Specific goals and measures of healing can differ from person to person. Broadly, experts say they want patients to be able to live full lives without the past event getting in the way of their present.

"You never forget" trauma, McBeth said. But after therapy, "you're not living it every day."

"The long-term goal is to be able to know something happened," Orenbuch said, "without having an emotional response to that knowledge."

Where Can I Find A Trauma Therapist?

There is no national or state directory of therapists who specialize in trauma. But you can search for trauma therapists in your area using online databases like the one at psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/trauma-and-ptsd, or therapy-specific databases like the EMDR lookup tool at emdr.com/SEARCH. If you're insured, you can use the search function on your insurance company's website to find an in-network provider.

Help Available

Some trauma survivors have suicidal thoughts. If you or someone you know is thinking of suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text TALK to the Crisis Text Line at 741741.

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