

Coping with Trauma

Dealing with difficult events...

What is a trauma?

A trauma is a difficult event which is outside most people's everyday experience – for example a car accident, a fire, or a mugging. People in the armed forces or rescue services are frequently exposed to trauma.

Surely trauma only affects people who are directly involved in the event?

No, it can also affect witnesses, rescuers, and family and friends of survivors.

What sort of reactions could you expect after a traumatic event?

People have reported a whole range of reactions. These could be in any of the five areas which you have learned about in other leaflets – have a look at the diagram on the next page.

Can you still have reactions a long time after a traumatic event?

Yes, you can have reactions whether the event was recent or a long time ago. These reactions are your body's way of coping and can affect anybody, though they usually lessen over time.

What is post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

People who suffer from severe reactions over a long period are said to suffer from PTSD.

How can I help myself after a traumatic event?

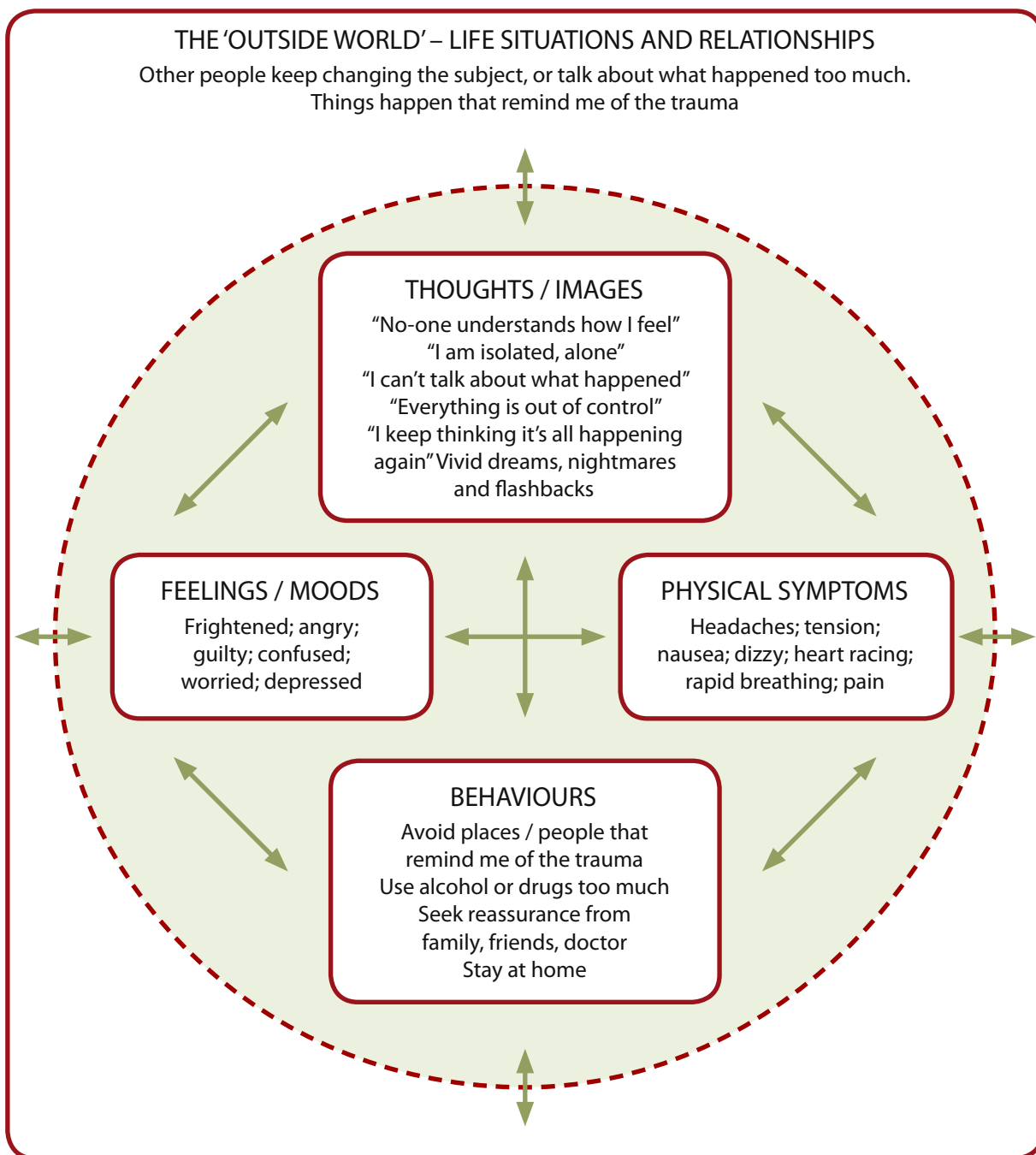
- Don't bottle up your feelings – expressing your emotions and thoughts about what has happened is part of getting better.
- Talk with others about what has happened to you. Avoiding the subject might make you feel better in the short term, but in reality it will stop you getting over your feelings of fear and distress. Talking to other people who have been through similar experiences might help.
- Look after yourself and get plenty of rest.
- Make sure you understand what really did happen during the event. Sometimes people are too frightened to think about it and feel that the less they know the better – but the reality may not be as bad as you think.
- Try to keep busy and keep your day-to-day life going, as well as taking time out to think about the event.
- Don't expect the memories to go away – give yourself time to come to terms with what you have experienced. It may well take you some time to get back to normal, and even then there may be times when you have flashbacks about the trauma. There may be some parts of the experience which you never forget.

If the after-effects of the traumatic event are affecting you badly, go and see your doctor and ask for help.

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Continued...

This is a 'Five Areas' diagram of the possible effects of a traumatic event:



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