

Trauma and your body

Trauma can cause physiological changes to occur in your body. Many people impacted by crime or abuse experience trauma. This factsheet outlines some common ways that trauma affects the body.

Further information can be obtained by contacting the VSS Helpdesk on 1800 VICTIM (1800 842846).

1. What is trauma?

Trauma is a state of high arousal that stems from the instinctive 'fight-flight-freeze' response to an overwhelming threat.

Trauma may occur when you experience events, such as crime or abuse, that:

- leave you feeling powerless
- occur without warning
- occur multiple times.

Many people impacted by crime or abuse experience trauma.

2. How does trauma affect my body?

At the time of a traumatic event, the body releases a hormone called adrenaline to enable your body to fight, take flight, or freeze. It is impossible to predict what a person's response will be until a traumatic event happens.

The 'fight-flight-freeze' response can cause physiological changes to take place in your body, such as:

- an increased heart rate
- heavy or shallow breathing
- sweating
- a dry mouth
- tense muscles
- feeling unable to move
- hair standing on end
- dilated pupils.

The 'fight-flight-freeze' response doesn't necessarily stop because the immediate danger to the body has stopped. Sometimes, the 'fight-flight-freeze' response can still be felt after the traumatic event has taken place.

It is common for people impacted by crime or abuse to experience physiological changes to their body when they are reminded of a traumatic event.

3. Caring for your body after trauma

Give yourself permission to take time to recover after trauma. It's important to look after yourself. There are lots of ways to take time out for yourself, such as:

- talking to someone you trust about how you are feeling
- listening to music
- writing about how you are feeling in a journal
- taking time to relax and rest.

Recovering from trauma can take time, but you don't have to go through it alone. We are here if you need us. VSS provides free information and support to people impacted by crime and abuse.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like more information, please contact the VSS Helpdesk on

1800 VICTIM (1800 842846)

or view our website at victimsa.org

Commissioner for Victims' Rights voc.sa.gov.au

