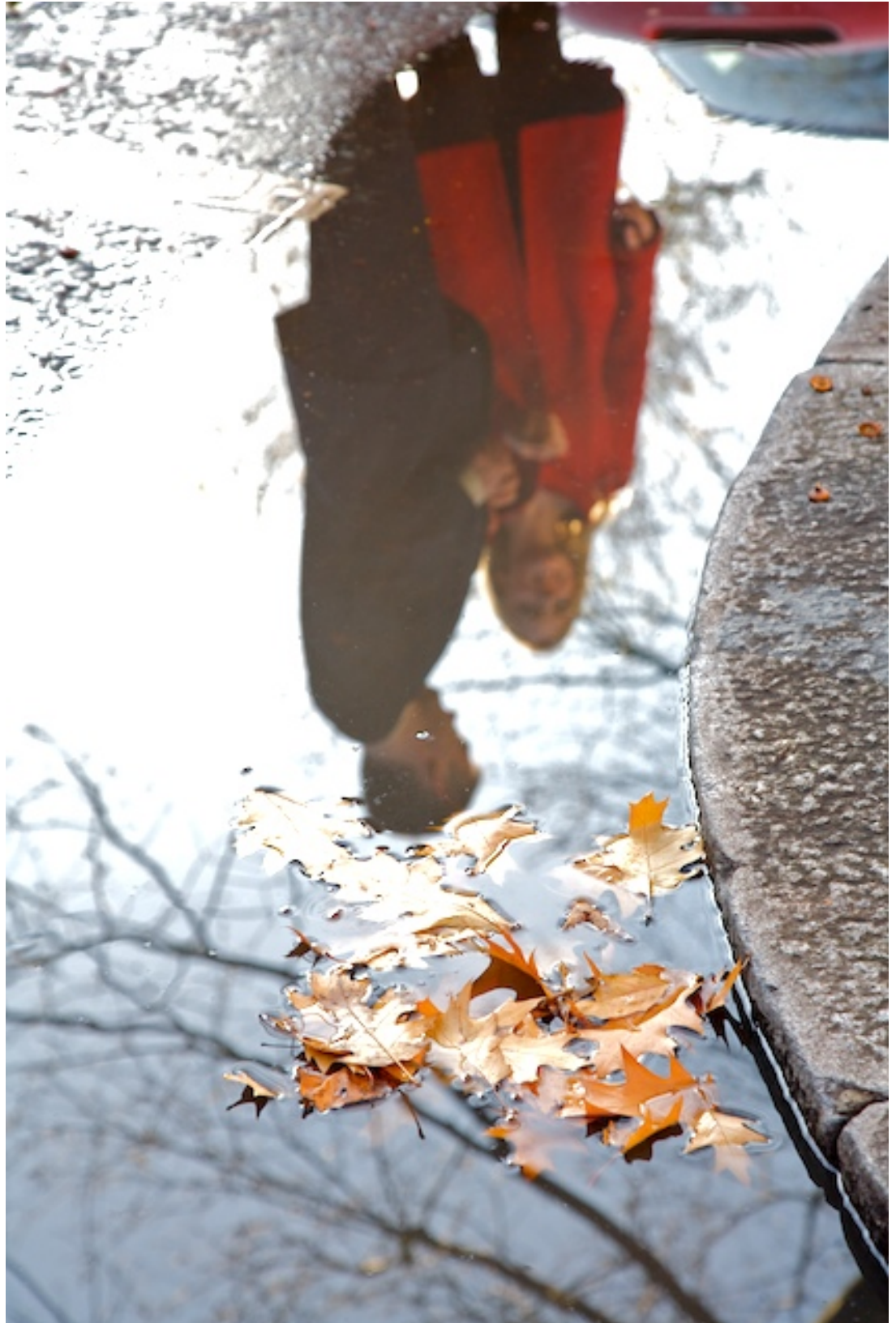


Coping with Trauma



What is trauma?

Trauma is used to describe highly stressful events. A traumatic event or situation creates psychological trauma when it overwhelms someone's ability to cope.

Trauma can have a severe effect on your emotional well-being and your ability to function day to day.

Traumatic events can be overwhelming and can leave you feeling out of control, with a sense of chaos. Feelings of grief and bereavement are also common.

Traumatic events might include a single episode of trauma such as an assault, a road traffic accident, a natural disaster, rape, murder or suicide of a loved one. Other examples include multiple trauma such as those experienced by refugees or asylum seekers.

Trauma is defined by the experience of the individual involved. Two people could undergo the same traumatic event and one person might be traumatized while the other person remains relatively unaffected.



Examples of trauma

Common examples of traumas that affect individuals include :

- accidents (such as traffic, car or physical accidents)
- assault (including physical or sexual assault, mugging or robbery, or family violence)
- witnessing a terrible event

Mass traumatic events include:

- terrorist attacks,
- mass shootings
- severe weather events (hurricane, tsunami, forest and bush fire).

But they don't just have to be isolated incidents. Common examples of recurring trauma include:

- Sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Torture and bullying

Common reactions to trauma

After any major disaster it is normal to experience a number of stress reactions. The outward signs may vary widely. Some will appear unaffected at first, only to experience symptoms at a later time. There can be vast differences among people who experience trauma. But there are a number of common reactions. If you feel you've been through a trauma have you experienced the common reactions described below?

Common reactions to trauma

- Tearfulness
- Feeling frightened
- Feeling angry or irritable
- Feeling guilty or somehow to blame
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling cut off or distant from others
- Feeling jumpy or restless
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nightmares about the event
- Loss in interest / pleasure in usual activities
- Feeling low or down in mood
- Strong feelings related to previous loss
- Feeling unusually tired or drained
- Flashbacks – vivid memories of the event spontaneously coming into your mind, almost as though you were there again.

All of the above reactions are normal, understandable and will usually reduce over time.

Things you can do to help

Even though you may feel out of your control there are things you can do to help.

Take each day at a time.

Make use of the supports around you – maintain contact with friends, family, social or work groups.

Some people find that talking things through is helpful. Choose a helpful friend or family member who you can trust.

If you feel you do not have the right support at home seek other supports such as voluntary agencies (see overleaf for other organisations that can help)

You may receive a lot of well-meaning advice from friends or family. Think things through and only do what you feel is best for you.

Look after your physical health – eat well, exercise regularly and try to get sufficient sleep.

Smoking, alcohol and illicit drugs are likely to make these reactions worse. Avoid sedatives or tranquillizers.

Return to your usual routine as soon as possible.

If you are struggling don't suffer alone. It can be hard to ask for help but there are people who can help you, whether they be friends, family, support groups or trained counsellors.

What to do if your problems don't go away or become too much for you to cope with

Sometimes the stress can be too much to handle alone.

If you feel things are not improving or you wish to speak to someone about your concerns, your GP would be the most helpful person to approach initially. There are also a number of voluntary agencies and support groups who can help - please see overleaf for more information.

We have a dedicated service for individuals over

14 who have experienced trauma. This service is staffed by clinicians with specific expertise in dealing with the aftermath of trauma. To find out more about this service please visit www.tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/adultswhohaveexperiencedtrauma

We also have a dedicated service for asylum seekers or those with refugee status.

Sometimes the stress can be too much to handle alone. Ask for help if you:

- Are not able to take care of yourself or your children.
- Are not able to do your job.
- Use alcohol or drugs to get away from your problems.
- Feel sad or depressed for more than two weeks
- Think about suicide.



Other organisations who can help

Refugee Action

Refugee Action's Asylum Advice teams provide a reception service for newly arrived asylum seekers, as well as advice and advocacy. Call 020 7654 7700 or visit www.refugee-action.org.uk

Big White Wall

The Big White Wall is an online support network for those in emotional distress. On Big White Wall you can talk openly, honestly and anonymously about whatever is on your mind. The service is facilitated by trained staff. Visit www.bigwhitewall.com

Rape Crisis

Rape Crisis Centres provide a range of specialist services for women and girls that have been raped or experienced another form of sexual violence - whether as adults or as children. Visit the website at www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Phone 08457 90 90 90, email [Jo](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or visit www.samaritans.org

Red Cross

The British Red Cross are a volunteer-led humanitarian organisation that helps people in crisis, whoever, and wherever they are. Call 0844 871 11 11 or visit www.redcross.org.uk

Child Bereavement Charity

The charity provides support and information to all affected by the death of a baby or child or when children are bereaved. Call 01494 446648 or visit www.childbereavement.org.uk

Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture

The only organisation in the UK dedicated solely to the treatment of torture survivors. Visit www.torturecare.org.uk to find out more.

For a full range of leaflets visit our website www.tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/lifeissues

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust offers psychotherapy and mental health services for a wide range of issues. If you would like to talk to someone about the possibility of counseling or therapy, you can contact our PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on 0208 938 2523 or email dlampon@tavi-port.nhs.uk