



COUNSELING CENTER

Coping with Trauma Life Hack

Trauma Defined: “Trauma is any past experience that one perceives as negative and that negatively impacts your present life. It creates extreme stress in the body and mind. Traumas can be perceived as horrific, helpless to prevent, and threatening to either your survival or the survival of others ... or it can be when something happens to you large or small, that leaves you feeling distress and you are unable to process it” (Maiberger, 2008-2021).

Trauma Signs & Symptoms

- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
- Symptoms of irritability and outbursts of anger
- Re-experiencing of the traumatic event - flashbacks
- Self-destructive behavior
- Hypervigilance
- Under-arousal: frozen, non-expressive, dissociation
- Exaggerated alarm response
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble falling asleep or staying awake (Maiberger, 2008-2021)

Coping Options

Mental Grounding – Bringing prefrontal cortex back online with perspective and calming brain’s survival response

- “This is old stuff getting triggered, not happening currently”
- “I’m not losing my mind; this is my brain’s normal, though stuck, survival response” [fight/flight/freeze/fawn response]
- “My name is _____. Today is _____”
- Naming lists of things: the periodic table elements, colors, dog breeds, etc.

Physical Grounding – Bringing body into the present moment

- Progressive muscle relaxation:
 - Inhale and tense muscle groups, exhale and release muscle tension, repeat throughout body
- Slow, deep breaths, emphasizing a long exhale
- Temperature change: cold water on face, hold ice cube, ice on neck
 - Drink cold water, fizzy water
- Intense exercise: pushups, jumping jacks, planks

Emotional Grounding – Practicing self-kindness and nonjudgment instead of self-criticism

- Say comforting/soothing and non-judgmental statements to yourself; thinking of someone you love, people who love you
- Visualize a supportive character (fictional, historical, animal, etc.)

