

# PTSD

**Stop Telling Me to Talk About It**



**ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW  
TO OVERCOME TRAUMA**

**Vivienne Emery**

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## Introduction

The aim of this e-book is to provide you with details about what happens in the brain and the body during and after a traumatic event. You will also find descriptions of treatments that are now available to unhook the emotion from distressing memories so that you are in a better position to talk about these difficult and disturbing life events.

PTSD stands for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The term is used to describe a range of physical and emotional symptoms that people may experience following a traumatic event.

PTSD is now seen as a construct beyond military experiences and major disasters. It is commonly diagnosed in individuals who have survived traumatic events that were life threatening, believed to be life threatening or highly distressing. Such events could include:

- Being mugged, raped or attacked
- Natural disasters
- Rail accidents, or car or plane crashes
- Physical, sexual or psychological abuse or torture
- Having a heart attack or distressing medical procedure
- A difficult childbirth
- Witnessing or being involved in combat or violent conflict
- Going through a difficult divorce
- Distressing events that are stretched out over time, such as caring for a loved one whilst they lose the battle with a terminal illness.

You can develop PTSD weeks, months or even years after the traumatic event.

It is never too late to detect and treat PTSD. If there is anything you have experienced in your life that still haunts you, the information in this book is for you.

\* PLEASE NOTE: To protect confidentiality, the personal details in the case history used in this book have been changed.

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## Ben's story

Ben was in a restaurant with his family to celebrate his son's eleventh birthday. He looked around the table at his wife and child. He could see the joy in their eyes and hear the laughter in their voices as they sang happy birthday, but he felt nothing. He thought to himself, 'What a monster I must be to feel completely numb on my son's special day.'

He forced a smile and started to eat his meal. The waiter walked by with a plate of garlic bread and Ben felt sick as the smell of it reached his nostrils. His heart began racing and he felt panicked. He knew he had to get out of the restaurant and, before he had even made the decision to move, he was already running towards the door. His son came out after him to ask if he was okay, but Ben roared at him to go back inside. This angry outburst towards his son was completely unjustified and over the top – and it was the fourth time that week he had shouted at him.

Ben knew his son hadn't done anything to deserve this harsh reaction, but he felt so irritable and on edge these days that it didn't take much for him to blow up. Only last month his son had playfully jumped on his back and Ben had completely lost it. He felt that if he could just sleep he would feel better, because the one emotion he *could* feel in his body was exhaustion. He felt as though he hadn't slept at all in the last two years since it had happened. If he did manage to fall asleep, it wasn't long before he woke up in a cold sweat calling for help.

Just over two years earlier, Ben had witnessed the brutal and senseless murder of his younger brother outside a pub. His brother had been attacked with a broken bottle whilst Ben was pinned to the floor by two of the attacker's friends. Ben was unable to do anything to stop what was happening and looked on in horror as his brother was struck with a bottle multiple times. The police were called and the men fled the scene, but his brother had died in Ben's arms by the time the ambulance arrived.

He tried to be strong for his family but over time he felt worse and worse; some days he felt numb and depressed and other days he was on edge and irritable. The most difficult part to handle, however, were the flashbacks because they took him right back to that night and he had to re-live the experience all over again.

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Two years had passed since that night and yet the memory was live and present in his mind and body as though it had happened only yesterday. Ben had been told by his doctor that he was probably suffering from PTSD and was given the name of a counsellor so that he could talk through his feelings. He still hadn't made the appointment because, even if he wanted to talk about it, he had no words. He had tried about a year ago to broach the subject with his wife, the person he loved and trusted most in life, but as soon as he got near to the memory of that night his mind and body exploded in a minefield of fearful sensations.

He had taken sick leave from work and was going out less and less because it didn't seem to take much for him to have a mild panic attack. It felt as though he had a wild and ferocious hound chained up inside his body, and his only priority was to avoid waking it up.

It was difficult to make decisions and to concentrate for long periods of time. Ben felt he was coming apart, losing the sense of who he was and what he loved and enjoyed. Sometimes he couldn't feel parts of his body; other times he didn't recognise his own face when he looked in a mirror.

He had run out of ideas about how to help himself and had resorted to self-medicating with alcohol as a way of coping and silencing the fear in his body. He didn't see how things could possibly improve, especially since he continued to feel worse as time moved on.

Why would the brain want to retain the horror of that evening in such detail and continue to remind Ben of it when he was exposed to certain triggers in his environment?

### **Trauma and the brain**

Although it may seem like your brain is haunting and tormenting you, it actually believes it is helping you. In order to understand this better, we need to look at what happens in the brain during a traumatic event and the evolutionary purpose behind it.

Back in the day, when our ancestors encountered danger they would retain as much information about the scene so that they would have a better chance of survival the next time. For example, before they saw the tiger charging towards them they might have heard a rustle in the trees or the sound of a stick snapping in two. They would have learnt that a rustle in the



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bushes and the snapping of a stick were sounds of danger. Not every rustle in the bushes will be a hungry tiger, but the body and brain believe it is better to be safe than sorry.

We evolved to remember important details when faced with a life-threatening event so that the brain and body can alert us and get us out of trouble the next time we are in a similar situation.

### **Why does the body feel a sense of panic?**

There is a part of your brain known as the amygdala that is your own private guard dog. It is constantly scanning the environment looking for details that have previously made you fearful. As soon as something in the environment triggers a match to a stimulus in the amygdala, your survival response is switched on.<sup>1</sup>

This means that your heart rate increases and extra blood is pumped around the body and into the muscles. Stress hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol are released. The digestion process is shut down so that blood can be diverted away from the stomach and into your muscles. You need this extra energy and fuel supply in order to run away or have the strength to stay and fight. It is known as the fight-or-flight response.

When this response is activated, the thinking brain is turned off so that the amygdala (the emotional part of the brain) can make quick, uncomplicated, life-saving decisions. There is no time for debating the best option. The emotional brain decides to start running before the thinking brain realises what is happening. When we see a bus coming towards us, we jump out of the way without a moment's hesitation or thought; it is only afterwards, when we are out of harm's way, that we can process and think about what had just happened.<sup>2</sup>

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## Why did Ben leave the restaurant in a state of panic and fear?

Due to Ben's intense fear on the night of the attack, many details were retained in his amygdala. The body and brain received the message that Ben was in extreme distress and danger and they downloaded as much information as possible to avoid a similar situation in the future.

Whilst Ben was being held down on the ground, one of the men holding him had a strong scent of stale garlic on his hands and breath. The man that was attacking his brother was wearing a brown leather jacket and had a silver earring in his left ear. There was a noise of smashing glass as the bottle broke. The car they escaped in was white. The attack was so horrific, and Ben's level of fear was so high, that these details were encoded very deeply in his brain. As a result, any faint smell of garlic or a flash of silver in someone's ear, or a person walking by wearing a brown leather coat, triggered alarm in Ben's brain and activated his fight-or-flight response.

The guard dog in your emotional brain is so fearful that you will experience something so awful again that it scans the environment constantly for any information that even slightly resembles the details of what happened during a traumatic event. As it does this, the survival response is activated so that you can escape and you will have a better chance of getting out of there alive and unharmed. The body and mind are not trying to torture you when they trigger this response; they believe they are protecting you from imminent danger.

Your guard dog doesn't have the cognitive ability of the thinking brain, and it can only retain basic and simplistic information about the traumatic scene. It makes no apologies for this because it believes that any silver earring, whether worn by a man or a woman or whether large or small, could be the one that caused you so much fear. It believes it is better to activate the fight-or-flight response and get away than to stay in a possibly dangerous situation and die. The worst that can happen is you feel foolish for reacting in that way if the guard dog gets it wrong. It doesn't think this is a bad pay off; getting it wrong and feeling foolish is better than losing your life.

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Ben's amygdala (guard dog) retained the detail of the scent of garlic. This meant *any* garlic smell in any form could trigger a survival response in him; it wasn't just a stale smell of garlic on someone's hands – it could be a fresh, subtle aroma of garlic in a joint of roast lamb, for example.

Ben stored the noise of glass breaking, not only bottles but *any* glass breaking. He retained the information that the vehicle was white and so *any* white car, no matter the make or model, could trigger alarm. As I said, your guard dog makes no apologies for these imprecise descriptions; it believes it is better to be safe than sorry. It wants to make sure you are covered so there is no chance of you being trapped in that situation again.

As a result, Ben remained hypervigilant and fearful. When this memory was triggered, it produced the same emotions and reactions in him as if the event was happening in the present moment. This explains the awful symptoms many people experience when suffering from PTSD, such as high anxiety, flashbacks, panic attacks and intrusive memories.

When you are traumatised and stuck in the fight-or-flight response, your fear and panic can escalate because you start to experience this survival response in different locations, such as restaurants and shopping centres, and your emotional brain adds these places as new triggers. It says, 'Oh, okay, restaurants are now life-threatening places too. Don't worry, next time we are anywhere near one I'll switch on your fight-or-flight response.'

The more we are triggered, the more new triggers are added. We can get stuck in this hyper-alert state of never being able to let our guard down. People suffering from PTSD find their symptoms can snowball as more and more places and things feel unsafe. As a result, they go out less and less and do less and less.

Although the body is trying to help, the sensations are extremely uncomfortable and you can begin to develop a fear of fear itself. For more information on the reasons for this, and practical ideas to help you overcome the fear you can experience during anxiety and panic attacks, visit [www.vivienneemery.com](http://www.vivienneemery.com).

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## **Why does Ben feel numb and disengaged one moment and anxious and fearful the next?**

You may be familiar with the fight-or-flight response because it is often mentioned when talking about stress and anxiety. A very different way to respond to extreme fear and stress that isn't as well-known is the flop or 'fawn' response. This is an extremely ancient survival mechanism that we have inherited from our reptile ancestors.

We have learnt a lot about this fourth response thanks to Stephen Porges and his research on polyvagal theory in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> Polyvagal refers to the many branches of the vagal nerve, an extremely important nerve that is responsible for carrying signals between the brain and the rest of the body.

The flop response is the complete opposite to fight-or-flight. Instead of having an energetic emergency response when we are stressed, our system shuts down. The body and mind go offline, and we flop.

## **Why would we need to resort to this type of response?**

If we can't fight or run away to escape a dangerous threat, the flop response is activated. This could apply to a person who is trapped in a burning car, or a war prisoner who is being tortured, or a child who is being sexually abused by a caregiver. In these situations, the stress on the body is immense; the person is petrified and unable to run or fight back.

There is no hope of a way out. The body and the mind are overwhelmed with stress and fear. It is not possible to sustain this level of stress response in the body for a prolonged period, and the only way the body can protect itself is to completely shut down. It goes into this survival response in order to slow down the heart and other bodily processes. Our awareness is also shut down and we start to dissociate. In other words, we drift out of ourselves so that nothing matters, including the events around us. We are not even aware of the physical pain

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our body is enduring. Victims of abuse and torture often report watching themselves going through the ordeal from above, as if it were happening to someone else.

As Ben was held down during the whole attack, he couldn't fight back or run away. Having to watch his brother being attacked in this way and not being able to intervene would have created unimaginable levels of stress and fear within his body. As a result, his nervous system probably activated this ancient flop survival system. Although this was useful at the time to protect his physical and mental well-being, in the long term there is a possibility that his nervous system would dip back into this state when he felt anxious or stressed in everyday life. He could even get stuck there.<sup>3</sup>

This would explain why he often felt numb and distant from his loved ones. In order to reduce the emotion of fear in his body, all his emotions need to be turned down. Ben is not a 'monster', as he referred to himself for feeling this way at his son's birthday dinner. His body is responding in the only way it knows how. Until the trauma is processed and his stress levels are lowered, he will continue to swing from a flop response to a fight-or-flight response.

When Ben is stressed or triggered, his body now responds in one of two ways: it can either start to feel alert and agitated as it moves into fight-or-flight, or it begins to shut down. Instead of feeling anxious and fearful, he feels numb, low, demotivated and even depressed.<sup>4</sup>

Spending long periods of time in fight, flight or flop leads to very high levels of stress hormones being released in our system. Consequently, it can take us a lot longer to calm down and our natural ability to fall asleep is disrupted because it is impossible to fall into a deep sleep when our body is highly aroused with fear. Unsurprisingly, many traumatised individuals suffer from insomnia.

Links have been found between high emotional arousal in the day, disrupted dream sleep at night and depression.<sup>5</sup> It is no wonder that many sufferers from PTSD also experience depression. To exacerbate the problem, the more we stay home and disengage from life, the

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more we will neglect our psychological needs. Mental health issues can result when we stop meeting our innate need to stretch, grow and feel part of society.

If you would like more information on depression and how to lift it naturally, you can download the free e-book *Stop telling me to cheer up* when you go to [www.vivienneemery.com](http://www.vivienneemery.com). You can also download a free audio on this website to help you sleep.

### **Why do some people hold on to their traumatic experiences longer than other people?**

In order to remove the emotion from the memory, the brain needs to see it as an event that happened in the past. The brain is only able to do this when it is calm and relaxed. In 75% of trauma cases, the mind and body are able to calm down for long enough to process the memory. However, in 25% of cases, they cannot.<sup>6</sup>

For some people who have been traumatised, the mind and body cannot calm down long enough for the memory to be labelled as a 'past event'. The emotion around this event remains so high that the memory stays in the highly emotional part of the brain (the amygdala). Emotional memories that are held in the amygdala remain active and live. This part of the brain lives only in the present; if a traumatic memory gets stuck there, it will feel live and present even if it happened many years ago.

We all have the potential to develop PTSD after a traumatic event; the 25% who do develop it are not weak.

There a number of factors why you may be unable to process a difficult memory. These include:

- You were unable to protect yourself, or had no means of escape (this is a major factor).
- The event was extremely horrific and distressing.
- You had experienced other traumatic events in the past.

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- Your stress levels were high before the traumatic incident. For example, soldiers often face one stressful situation after another, and they may already be stuck in the fight-or-flight zone before experiencing a traumatic event. It will therefore be very difficult for them to calm down their nervous systems in order to process the incident.

## Processing trauma

Although it is beneficial to talk about difficult experiences and events in our lives, when people are severely traumatised, the area in the brain responsible for producing language (Broca's area) shuts down. Brain scans show that this area goes offline when a flashback is triggered.<sup>7</sup>

Some children who experience trauma are unable to talk for months or even years after a traumatic event. Asking a traumatised person to recount their experience can be very challenging, and it can embed the trauma even further. Some individuals who can recount what happened do so with no emotion at all; they have separated themselves from the experience. They stare straight ahead and have a blank look in their eyes. Talking about the event whilst in this dissociated state is not very helpful or therapeutic.

Using talking therapy and/or cognitive therapy as a first step in recovery can be problematic because PTSD is not driven by thoughts. It is all to do with feelings and emotions, so treating it by trying to reason with it rarely works.

Talking therapy and cognitive therapy can be effective and are certainly important parts of recovery. It is vital to discuss and work through thoughts and feelings that may accompany a traumatic event, such as shame, grief, blame and anger – but before the client can embark on this stage in their journey of recovery, they need to remove the emotion that is attached to the traumatic event.

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## Trauma treatments

Trauma treatments such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) and EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) can be effective in reducing the strong emotion in the client so that the memory can be processed. People are often confused about how these practices can possibly work, especially as the techniques seems slightly odd. However, in many cases they work because the therapist uses tapping or finger movements to keep the client present in the here and now. This allows the brain to recognise that the traumatic event is no longer live and present.

During EMDR treatment, the trauma survivor talks through their traumatic incident whilst focusing on a pen, light or finger as it moves from side to side.<sup>8</sup> During the EFT, the traumatised survivor is encouraged to think about the distressing memory whilst tapping various parts of their body.<sup>9</sup> The principle behind both of these techniques is to distract the brain so that it can perceive the trauma as a past narrative event. There is also an element of relaxation in these practices that allows the brain to be more objective, process the memory and release it from the amygdala.

These techniques won't be effective if you cannot remain calm and relaxed during the process. This also explains why these treatments, although effective, may need many sessions to unhook the emotion from the memory.

Although I have helped a number of clients using these techniques, I have had most success with a technique known as the Rewind technique. Often one session is all that is needed to unhook the emotion from the memory. The therapist uses guided imagery so that the client remains deeply relaxed throughout the process. Profound relaxation enables the brain to watch and observe the event from a safe and secure point.

Once in a deeply relaxed state, the trauma survivor is asked to watch themselves watching the event from a dissociated position, then to play the event in fast forward and in reverse. Seeing the event in rewind or backwards confuses the brain and neutralises the fear: we can't be fearful and confused at the same time. The process is repeated at least three times. If the client becomes visibly distressed, the therapist stops and relaxes them back into a calm state. The client can open their eyes and ask for the process to be stopped at any time.



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## Why does this trauma technique work?

I mentioned that the mind and body need to relax in order to process trauma because once the nervous system calms back down, the rational part of our brain switches back on, especially an area known as the hippocampus.

All this means is that the emotional brain and the thinking brain can start communicating with each other again. Instead of the traumatic memory being held in the amygdala (that part of your emotional brain where your guard dog lives) and labelled as ‘live’, ‘present’, and ‘dangerous’, the hippocampus can give it context so it is labelled as ‘something that happened at a specific time in the past, in a specific place, involving a specific person’.

It will always be a difficult and painful memory, but it will no longer produce the traumatic sensations that it did at the time. It has been processed as a past narrative event that can no longer harm you and, as a result, can no longer be triggered by stimuli in the environment. Your guard dog has been told that this threat is no longer present; it was an event in the past due to a specific set of circumstances, and there is no point scanning the environment any longer for danger related to it. As a result, flashbacks and nightmares connected to the event are no longer an issue for many people. This process occurs naturally in the 75% of people who do not develop PTSD after a traumatic event.

As well as being safe, quick and painless, this technique also has the advantage of being non-voyeuristic. The process can be completed without the client telling the therapist intimate details. Once the emotion has been unhooked from the memory, the client can talk about their experience if they wish to.

This technique was first created and used by Milton Erickson, a renowned American psychiatrist and hypnotherapist. It was later developed by Richard Bandler, co-creator of Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). Dr David Muss developed it further and called it the Rewind technique so that it could be used when treating PTSD. In 2004 Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrell, founders of the Human Givens Institute, refined it even further and started training all their therapists to use it.<sup>10</sup>

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Due to its high success rate in reducing the symptoms of trauma, it is currently the main treatment used by a number of PTSD charities in the UK.<sup>11</sup>

## Breath science

We all have experiences that we hold on to that trigger stress and panic in the body. When this happens, our breath automatically becomes short and shallow. This pattern of breathing tells the brain that we are fearful so it releases more stress hormones; these, in turn, make us feel more anxious. It becomes a vicious circle.

It is therefore important to regularly calm down the nervous system during the day. We all have a natural process to relax the mind and body; it is called the relaxation response and it can be easily activated by having a longer out-breath than in-breath.

If we were to observe our breath whilst relaxing, we would notice that the out-breath is longer than the in-breath. Breathing in this way is a sign to the rest of the body that there is no threat and we can remain calm and at rest. When we are stressed or anxious, we can train our bodies to evoke the relaxation response at will by breathing out for longer than we breathe in. This is a basic law of biology and the quickest way to stimulate the relaxation response. If you breathe in this manner, your body will have no choice but to relax. As soon as your breath changes in this way the rest of the body calms down, reducing the speed of your heart and turning off the adrenalin.

Take a moment to try it now. Breathe in for four, then breathe out for eight. In for four and out for eight. Continue to breathe in this way for five to ten minutes. If it helps, play a relaxing song in the background so that the time passes more quickly. The more you use and practise it the more natural and easier it becomes and the quicker you can activate the relaxation response.

If you are not comfortable with the count of four and eight, you can choose your own ratio. As long as the outbreath is longer than the in breath your relaxation response will be activated.

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Another way to deeply relax the body is to take time out in your day to listen to guided relaxation audios. There is good evidence to show how these practices calm the nervous system and increase our resilience to stress and anxiety.<sup>12</sup>

## Muscle memory

If you were kneeling down when a bomb went off, being on your knees after the event can trigger fear and alarm because the body also retains the memory of a traumatic event. When Ben's son jumped on his back in a playful way, Ben was triggered because his back muscles remember being pinned down. He was taken straight back to that awful night when his brother was attacked and, in response to this trigger, his body activated the fight-or-flight response.

The thinking brain doesn't even get a look in when this happens. It didn't matter that Ben was safe in his own home with his family; he had thrown his son to the floor before he was even aware of what he was doing, and to whom. Ben felt so confused when this happened that he blamed his son for acting the fool because he couldn't understand why he had responded in such an aggressive way.

In addition to processing the mental images in the brain, we also need to look at releasing the trauma held in the body. We only need to look at footage of soldiers from World War 1 who were suffering from shellshock to see the effect trauma has on the body. It is not just horror in the mind; the body feels and remembers the horror, too. Many WW1 soldiers felt the natural urge to run and fight when trapped in the trenches, but that was impossible. Hour after hour, day after day, month after month, these soldiers were stuck in trench warfare. Their bodies were screaming at them to run, move, fight, do something – but all they could do was stay immobile, feeling the immense stress and tension building up in their system with no way of releasing it.

If a gazelle in the wild manages to escape the jaws of a lion, she finds a place where she knows she is safe. She will shake and tremble to release the traumatic experience, then run

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off to be with the rest of the gazelles. We cannot shake off our traumatic experiences like some animals can, but there are things we can do to release the trauma held in our muscles.

A type of therapy known as Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, developed by Pat Ogden and Peter Levine, uses movement to allow individuals to increase their tolerance to internal sensations.<sup>13</sup> Trauma survivors are given exercises that allow them to complete actions that were suppressed during the traumatic event. Performing actions in therapy to complete what the body had started can help to relieve the tension in the muscles.<sup>13</sup>

It is also the case that people feel numb in certain areas of their bodies where physical or sexual trauma occurred. Movement exercises can gradually build up sensations in these areas to increase the individual's tolerance of them over time.

This is an area of trauma treatment that is often overlooked, but it is an important part of recovery because constant muscle tension can lead to spasms, back pain, headaches, fibromyalgia, stomach cramps and numbness.

### **Other practices to ease the tension in the mind and body**

Body and mind practices, such as aikido, yoga and qigong, have been found to be extremely therapeutic after experiencing a traumatic event.<sup>14</sup> Taking your attention to different parts of your body as you move and breathe is a good start in regaining a sense of control and awareness of sensations in your body so that you no longer fear being in your own skin.

Dancing, swaying and even rocking on a chair releases tension and calms the nervous system. You don't need to go to a dance class; just moving to a song in the privacy of your own home can help. Rocking releases endorphins (feel good chemicals) which in turn lower stress and pain levels. Certain animals, including elephants, sometimes move their bodies from side to side to alleviate pain or distress.

When we hide from sensations in the body, we can begin to over eat, over exercise or self-medicate to silence the intolerable horror held within it. When we feel numb, we can resort to self-harm or participate in high-risk activities just so that we feel something because we simply can't stand the emptiness any longer.

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Being held and hugged by others can calm our nervous system. Touch wakes up parts of the body that have been traumatised and releases the ‘love hormone’ oxytocin, which lowers anxiety and fear in the body.

If it feels too much right now to have human contact, spending time with domestic animals is a great alternative. Sometimes it is even better, because when you look deep into a dog’s eyes there is no judgement there, only love. Many trauma centers use horses and dogs in their therapy programmes. Being around loving animals keeps you in the present moment and allows you to connect to other beings. When we are stuck in fight, flight or flop our brain doesn’t want us to connect to others around us because it doesn’t believe it is safe. You need to reconnect slowly so that you don’t alarm your nervous system, and being around animals is a great way to do this.

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## Life after trauma

*The wound is the place where light enters you.* Rumi

If you decide to get help, and I sincerely hope that you do, look for a therapist who is trained in different trauma techniques as well as cognitive and talking therapies. This way, it is more likely to take weeks rather than years to overcome traumatic incidents.

Be aware, however, that even after the emotion in the trauma has been processed it can be difficult to readjust back into your life because first you need to make sense of what happened. How you interpret traumatic events will determine how empowered you feel. Will you feel capable and strong because you managed to cope and come through the other side? Or will you feel damaged, inferior and too helpless to take action?

This is where cognitive and talking therapies come into their own. You can create small goals that you believe to be realistic and start to put your life back together. This can take time if PTSD has kept you locked away in your own private hell for too long, but it is more than possible. Seek support from friends, family members or a therapist to guide and support you in your journey.

It can be useful to take inspiration from others who have taken their pain and used it for something good. Ben, after going through a long journey of recovery, started a group for men to share difficult emotions and experiences. They go camping once a month and sit round a fire. If no one feels like talking, they pull out a guitar and sing. Not only has it helped the men in the group, but it has given Ben a new purpose in life to ease the suffering of others and to show them ways to release stress and tension in their minds and bodies.

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## List of PTSD symptoms

Symptoms include:

- Flashbacks and nightmares
- Constantly being on guard or 'hypervigilant'
- Persistent feelings of fear and anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Irritability and inappropriate outbursts of anger
- Feeling numb and not being able to experience a 'normal' range of emotions
- Low mood and disinterest in activities and relationships that once gave you pleasure
- Poor memory, difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- A fragmented 'sense of self'
- Unhealthy coping strategies to escape from these symptoms, such as comfort eating, excessive physical exercise, self-medication with alcohol or drugs, self-harming behaviours and suicidal thoughts

**Complex PTSD (CPTSD)** is a condition where you experience some symptoms of PTSD along with some additional symptoms, such as:

- difficulty controlling your emotions
- feeling very hostile or distrustful towards the world
- constant feelings of emptiness or hopelessness
- feeling as if you are permanently damaged or worthless
- feeling as if you are completely different to other people
- feeling like nobody can understand what happened to you
- avoiding friendships and relationships, or finding them very difficult
- alcohol or drug abuse
- depression

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- often experiencing dissociative symptoms
  - regular suicidal feelings

Complex PTSD can occur in adults or children who have repeatedly experienced traumatic events, such as physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, repeatedly witnessing violence and abuse, neglect or abandonment.

If complex PTSD goes undiagnosed in childhood, it can have a detrimental effect on your development, including your behaviour and self-confidence. If you have been diagnosed with complex PTSD and you have lost your ability to trust others, be aware that extra therapy sessions may be needed to build a relationship with the therapist.

I mentioned at the beginning of this book that it is never too late to detect and treat PTSD. It is vital to seek help if you are experiencing the effects of trauma. No one should have to live with fear in their body and horror in their mind.



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## **BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

*Freedom from anxiety in 5 steps: The ultimate guide to liberating yourself from stress and anxiety*

*Stop telling me to cheer up: A practical guide to lifting depression*

**For more information on Vivienne Emery and her books, courses and training go to [www.vivienneemery.com](http://www.vivienneemery.com)**

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