

Twin Rivers Recovery Centre

TRAUMA & ADDICTION

There is no limit to what can cause a person to suffer with trauma.

Trauma is an incident or occurrence that happens with or without warning. It can be categorized as an over-whelming life-changing experience. It is typically a physical and/or emotional shock that consumes your whole being! A plane crash, automobile accident, sudden or near death experience or major life alterations (such as the ending of a relationship) can all be considered traumatic whether experienced or simply witnessed. A person's response can result in intense fear and helplessness. Even if a person has a substance abuse issue before trauma strikes, trauma often paves the way from abuse to addictions. Substance abuse addiction resulting from trauma is unlike the other triggers or gateways as there is more of a conscious desperation/need in regularly getting intoxicated in order to avoid the painful feelings.

'**Everyone**' has varying degrees of trauma in their life and individuals respond to trauma in different ways. What is traumatic to one person may not seem so traumatic to another! An example could be; the loss of a family pet where some family members are visibly traumatised and others may seem unruffled. The interesting thing is that the 'unruffled' person could actually be traumatised but keeps it hidden from others. Depending on the person and their ability to handle traumatic situations, these experiences can promote the 'shivers' when re-living the incident to panic attacks or even debilitating fear that could promote a highly depressed or catatonic state (the body shuts down). Similar to depression, trauma can lead to self-medication (prescription or black market) to numb the painful feelings, dilute the reality of the situation which in turn can lead to other addictions and destructive behaviours.

'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder-PTSD

Some of the emotional symptoms associated with PTSD are:

- Avoiding conversations associated with the trauma and not dealing with or confronting emotions and feelings.
- Avoiding certain people or places that may arouse memories of the incident.
- Feeling detached or estranged from society and friends. Interests, hobbies or activities are considered unimportant and not worth any effort to reincorporate into their life.
- Difficulty in having or continuing with intimate relationships. This is especially true if sexual or physical abuse is the reason for the trauma.

This leads the person to complain of Depression, Fatalism, Hopelessness, Indecision and Overwhelming fear

Some of the physical symptoms associated with PTSD are:

- Difficulty relaxing, or sleeping soundly.
- Easily agitated or irritable. Changeable behavior or mood swings
- Poor concentration or ability to complete tasks.

Research shows that Trauma can make a person 5 times more vulnerable to alcohol or drug use, in order to self-medicate. This is true of people who drink a lot, but are not yet addicted, as well as making relapse more likely for those who have already attended a programme. Consequently alcohol and drug use are the most predictable variables to exacerbate Trauma and magnify the consequences.

At Twin Rivers the multidisciplinary team are mindful that most clients have unresolved past traumas that are both known and unknown to the client causing them difficulties with decision making and boundary setting. Fortunately, Twin Rivers individualised approach helps to support clients suffering with painful feelings connected to past traumas. There are quite a number of 'models' that deal with trauma and yet the most important aspect of any model is 'listening' to the client and secondary to that, helping the client to start making sense of certain feelings that debilitates them.