



Trauma Issues for Women

Many women venturing into the counselor's office for the first time, have such traumatic events in their pasts as physical, verbal, emotional or sexual abuse; rape; abortion; neglect, abandonment, or rejection from parents; or major grief issues, to name a few.

Up until the time they seek counseling, women have used, to the maximum, all conscious and unconscious coping strategies possible to deal with their problems. Even the best defenses will fail in time and when the full weight of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual burdens press down, anxiety, depression, guilt, anger, and shame push some women right to the edge of the cliff, literally.

Our natural, God-given defenses, are there only to temporarily protect us from trauma and situations for which there is no escape. When we are capable of processing the trauma, God nudges and prompts us to seek Him and others who can help, and to work through the issues and find healing and peace. He is so gracious to us in this regard, that He will not expose our defenses until He knows we are capable of processing the issue.

One of the defenses most often used by trauma victims, is "minimizing", which is a form of denial. The self-talk says,

- ❖ "I can handle this myself."
- ❖ "This thing that happened to me is not that awful."
- ❖ "This is nothing compared to what so-and-so went through."
- ❖ "By pushing this to the back of my mind, I won't even have to think about it again."
- ❖ "This event will not have lifelong implications on my life."
- ❖ "I'm sure I'm over it."
- ❖ "I don't need a professional to help me with this".
- ❖ "Surely something that happened 20 years ago, isn't affecting my life today!"

The chart that follows shows some traumatic events and the emotional, relational, and spiritual fallout associated with them. Sometimes the results of the trauma develop into "posttraumatic stress disorder" (PTSD).

Hope & Healing for Traumatic Events

You may realize from reading this information, that an event in *your* past has produced many problems in your life either emotionally, relationally, or spiritually. Many times physical problems are the result of severe abuse as well, and dealing with physical pain or difficulties, constantly makes you think of the trauma event. Stress, anxiety, and depression are causes of many physical ailments including migraine headaches; back, neck and shoulder pain; TMJ (jaw pain); ulcers; acid reflux; hypertension (high blood pressure); exhaustion; to name just a few. Many people suffer physical symptoms caused by root emotional/psychological issues.

There are several steps you may immediately take to begin your healing process. The healing process tends to represent a journey, and at times the trip is lengthy, however, arriving at the destination is always rewarding and happy. Happiness, contentment, peace, love, and security have probably not been a major part of your life if you've experienced any of the traumas described in the chart. These things can be yours, however, if you will determine in your mind and heart that you want your life to change.

- ❖ Step 1: Acknowledge to yourself that the traumatic event has caused many negatives in your life. Refuse to use any form of denial that contradicts this fact.
- ❖ Step 2: Begin to educate yourself on your issue by reading (see book list in this issue).
- ❖ Step 3: Find a counselor who knows how to handle trauma issues, because most likely the task will be too great for you to conquer alone. Make that first appointment and decide to stay in counseling, even when the journey feels rough. Healing will be worth the work.
- ❖ Step 4: If you have a trusted friend with whom you can safely share, ask them to be your support person or pray-er while you are healing.
- ❖ Step 5: If your counselor suggests medication to help you with depression or anxiety, it is usually wise to take this advice. Anti-depressants simply address the physical symptoms of depression, allowing you to concentrate, sleep, eat, and have good energy to do your day-to-day life, and to work through the counseling process.
- ❖ Step 6: Prepare to commit your time and finances to do something for YOU. That is to get well and change your life for the better! If you have constantly put yourself aside for others and think you don't deserve time and healing for yourself - - rethink this one. Your time may be right now! If you are in good health, your loved ones will be much better off as well.
- ❖ Step 7: Look to God for His help in your situation. There is usually spiritual fallout from trauma. Even though you may be angry at God or not really know who He is, the spiritual part of your healing is extremely important. Be open to God.

Traumatic Bonding & Abuse Addiction

Abuse victims frequently find themselves in new abuse situations, even though they think they are trying to avoid them. Victims of physical, verbal, sexual or emotional abuse, having escaped the original situations, will run into more abuse with boyfriends, spouses, children, friends, co-workers & employers, and even at church. Damage is compounded by these new encounters with abuse. The cycle never seems to end, and in fact it probably won't until several changes happen.

There are several reasons why abuse "follows" a victim around!

1) The "programs" loaded into our brains from our original families, stay there even though we become adults. We seek to do two things naturally:

- a) replicate our parents relationship with a spouse or companion
- b) be drawn to what is familiar to us, even though it is negative, because with our well-practiced coping and defense strategies, we can somewhat marginally function in these sick relationships.

2) "Traumatic bonding" of the abuse victim to her perpetrator, whereby a false and unhealthy closeness occurs to compensate for the missing healthy bonding, causes an addiction to similar people and situations. The victim must get her "fix" by repetitive relationships with abusive people. Once she achieves her "fix", she feels "normal" again. The fallout of traumatic bonding is that more pain piles on top of the old pain. Furthermore, true intimacy can never be achieved, and therefore healthy relationships can never be achieved until the addictive cycle is broken.

3) "Shame" keeps the victim in bondage and defines her very being. "Shame" is the perception that I am . . .

- a) different from other people
- b) not as good as other people
- c) not approved or loved by God as with other people
- d) undeserving of anything good
- e) a bad person and should be punished continually
- f) going to punish myself if others don't.

Counseling for the emotional, psychological, and spiritual components of you and the trauma that happened to you, can help you to break the addictions, the traumatic bonds, and set you free to be a healthy new person. Do something good for yourself - you deserve it - healing is possible for you.