

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Recent events such as 9/11, Katrina, and the ongoing casualties in the Middle East, with our soldiers returning with mental and physical disabilities, have brought the misunderstood life-threatening condition known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the forefront.

As a survivor, and now a “thriver,” of this life-changing condition, fraught with a myriad of gut-wrenching symptoms that seem to defy human understanding, I have experienced this condition where one's body, mind and soul are tightly clenched in a suffering in which the soul cries out at its depth for any kind of relief. I have experienced days in which normal is defined as being able to just breathe and be present in my body for even minutes without collapsing in a kind of bone-weary distress. I am happy to say I have now transcended from what I refer to as “the dark night of the soul” to a place of emotional balance and inner peace.

The symptoms I had been experiencing as a result of a very traumatic childhood are essentially the same for any PTSD survivor; i.e., flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, compulsive eating, fear, anger, sleep and concentration problems, cycling between extreme highs and lows, loneliness, rage, irritability, shame, grief, emotional and even physical numbness and negative self beliefs.

These symptoms from PTSD can be from old childhood wounds or recent traumatic events. Regardless of whether they come from childhood or an accident, hurricane, loss, combat or domestic violence, the symptoms are all essentially the same. If the symptoms disappear after three to six months, it is called acute stress disorder or ASD. If it continues untreated, as is the case for many people such as myself, it takes on a life of its own and accelerates into what is now called PTSD. People can witness or hear about terrible things experienced by others and develop a condition known as vicarious trauma. The person's brain reacts as if the traumatic event was being experienced by them

personally instead of as an observer. Many individuals have developed vicarious trauma as a result of the continuing media coverage of 9/11 and Katrina. This is why it is especially important that children be protected from watching too much TV or continuously hearing grownups talking about these horrific events.

As with many other people who experience these misunderstood symptoms, it has been my personal and professional experience that until an individual understands how and why the body is manifesting these symptoms, it is very common to feel that he/she is going “insane,” along with the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. As soon as a PTSD survivor begins to understand and identify these symptoms and the biochemistry of trauma, the “insanity” feeling seems to disappear. The symptoms are still present. However, just the basic understanding of how the body reacts to create these symptoms can empower a person with the right tools to be involved in their own healing.

With all of the new research in this rapidly growing field of mind/body medicine, we now understand the biochemistry of survival that floods the bloodstream after trauma and impedes behavior, emotions, language and cognition. This all takes place in various parts of the brain, specifically the primitive parts of the brain, the limbic system and the subconscious mind, all of which process images, perceptions, emotions and kinesthetic movement. Specifically it is in these areas of the brain where the trauma is processed that **IMAGERY and HYPNOTHERAPY** is most effective as the intervention for healing PTSD, as imagery is all sensations, perceptions, emotions and kinesthetic movement.

It is important that PTSD be first addressed at the level of the brain where imagery can be introduced to ground the body and help provide protection and support. Long-term PTSD sufferers usually have little, if any, awareness of their own body sensations or feelings and have diminished feelings of safety, protection and support. Before the use of imagery and working with the primitive parts of the brain where the

trauma is stored, simply talking about the trauma at the conscious level further encourages the continual release of biochemicals and memories that keep recycling the trauma and the continuation of the life-crippling symptoms.

Imagery and hypnotherapy work best for healing PTSD by:

- helping to ground people back into their bodies
- promoting sleep
- reducing disassociation
- helping with self-soothing imagery when flashbacks or nightmares occur
- assisting with resolution of stored fears and emotional pain
- promoting the return of day-to day confidence

Healthy Body Healthy Mind understands the very complex issues that perpetuate in the life of someone experiencing PTSD **symptoms**. Our program is sensitive to every individual's needs and processes. Each session addresses a program specifically aligned to the individual's energy at the moment. For some it may be escorting the person back down into the body, because many PTSD sufferers are disconnected from their own bodies. For others it may be the need to address issues such as learning how to relax, relieve stress, promote restful sleep, deal with grief, anger or depression. Since individuals are not made from cookie cutters, the program is designed to be specific to the needs of each individual and their respective process.

The field of PTSD continues to emerge and come to the forefront with scientific research which proves the mind/ body connection. With the utilization of hypnotherapy and imagery, among other tools to implement in the recovery of PTSD, no one has to "silently suffer" anymore. You can get help with these interventions and go on to lead a productive, enriching life. I know this firsthand through my commitment to this process, as my life is no longer defined by the "trauma." Instead,

through my recovery I was able to connect, integrate and make peace with the wounds from the past.

You, too, through commitment to this process can discover your authentic self and learn to be present in your body with inner peace, happiness and emotional balance.