



# TRAUMA & HEALING

*“Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body.”* -Bessel van der Kolk (2013, p. 21)

Several definitions of trauma exist. Generally, trauma can be defined as an event marked by intense feelings of fear, powerlessness, pain, or shame. Many myths and misconceptions exist about trauma.

**MYTH:** Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is only experienced by combat veterans.

**REALITY:** PTSD can result from a range of first-hand experienced or witnessed traumatic events including but not limited to natural disasters, sexual trauma, loss, violence, and oppression.

**MYTH:** You have to remember your trauma in its entirety for it to be valid/real or to heal.

**REALITY:** *First and foremost, your trauma is valid.* “You are already healing from things you have yet to remember” (Davis, 1990). Healing does not require remembering, although our bodies often remember more than we can cognitively recall.

**MYTH:** PTSD and trauma symptoms can’t be treated.

**REALITY:** There are several options that have demonstrated effectiveness for the treatment of trauma including, but not limited to individual and group psychotherapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy (EMDR), expressive art therapy, and trauma-informed yoga.

Trauma responses can include re-experiencing the traumatic event (e.g., nightmares, memories, or flashbacks), avoidance or numbing (e.g., avoiding thoughts, feelings, sensations, environments, or activities associated with the trauma), hyperarousal (e.g., feeling “on edge” or “jumpy”), among others (e.g., guilt, fear, or discomfort being present within one’s body). Trauma, like all psychological experiences, impacts everyone differently; similarly, we all heal from trauma differently. Below are a few recommendations for places to start regardless of where you are in your healing journey.

- **Practice Self-Compassion.** Be patient with yourself, speak to yourself the way you would someone you love, and recognize that trauma responses are often normal responses to abnormal events. Check out our Self-Care and Self-Compassion handout for more.
- **Monitor Your Symptoms and Practice Coping.** Check out the free PTSD Coach app for more information about trauma, trauma responses and PTSD, and several coping options ranging from body scanning and meditation to inspirational quotes and calming sounds.
- **Get Connected.** Contact the Counseling and Testing Center by stopping by calling or visiting our website to learn more about the many services available.