

INFIDELITY-INDUCED TRAUMA

Trauma Defined

In general, trauma is defined as an emotional response to a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. There are three common elements: it was unexpected, the person was unprepared, and there was nothing the person could do to prevent it from happening. Trauma can overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, cause feelings of helplessness, and diminish their sense of self and their ability to process their full range of emotions and experiences. The word trauma comes from the Greek word that means "wound," and the betrayed partner has been wounded to the core of his/her being by their partner's betrayal of trust.

Betrayal Trauma or Infidelity-Induced Trauma

The term "betrayal trauma or infidelity-induced trauma" refers to the damage that is caused when someone experiences a betrayal in a primary relationship that damages the trust, safety, and security of the attachment. Sexual betrayal creates intense psychological pain and overwhelms our ability to cope or process the violations and emotions produced by the trauma. Partners experience post-traumatic stress reactions from betrayal trauma.

Trauma is more than stress

Many partners of betrayal trauma are not only traumatized with post-traumatic stress (PTS), but their trauma rises to the level of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms of PTSD are more severe and persistent than PTS and can interfere with daily functioning. PTSD is a medically diagnosed condition. Research now confirms that those who discover that they have been in relationship with sex addicts or partners with chronic compulsive sexual behavior experience symptoms of trauma and can even develop PTSD.

PTSD symptoms often follow the trauma of infidelity or sexual betrayal. It is likely that you have been psychologically traumatized by your partner's behavior and many betrayed partners have preexisting traumas that are triggered when they experience betrayal trauma.

Trauma can manifest with numerous symptoms and is different for every person. Because of the development of brain scan technology, we can now observe that trauma activity actually changes the structure and function of the brain. The trauma of betrayal affects our minds, bodies, and brains.

Trauma Response

The trauma of a partner's infidelity can evoke physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms called trauma responses. Its symptoms often go unnoticed or are mistaken for other health problems. The responses below are common experiences and can include some that can evoke unwarranted guilt or shame. Some responses might look like:

Physical Symptoms:

Agitation/Anxiety/Panic Attacks
Constipation/Diarrhea
Overeating/Under-eating
Inability to work/concentrate/Foggy-brain

Insomnia/Nightmares
Racing Heartbeat/High Blood Pressure
Aches/Pains/Fatigue/Muscle Tension
Migraines/Headaches

Emotional Responses:

Shock/Denial/Disbelief

Anger/Rage

Sadness/Hopelessness/Feeling Unworthy

Guilt/Self-blame

Shame

Confusion/Frustration

Depression

Irritability

Fear/Paranoia

Feeling Numb

Thoughts of suicide* (please consider

Thoughts of homicide

Behavioral Responses:

Weeping/Uncontrollable crying

Withdrawing/Isolating

Obsessive thinking/Ruminating

Deceptive behaviors or practices

Controlling/Manipulation/Caretaking

Blaming/Shaming

Yelling/Raging

Passive-aggressive anger

Physical violence

Over sharing

Toxic communication

Interrogating

Name calling (freak, pervert, etc.)

Over-reacting to everyday stress

Betrayal trauma can be a completely overwhelming and debilitating experience. Accepting that the events of the past cannot be rewritten often leads to feelings of great despair and can even lead to long lasting effects. Acknowledging and addressing trauma symptoms early in the process provides a foundation on which partners can build their healing and empowerment.

A primary focus of ISA is to recover from the effects of trauma.