



Understanding Trauma and Loss

As our culture and society becomes more accepting of mental health as an intricate component of each person's overall health there is now more interest in the concept and impact of trauma and traumatic events on physical and mental wellbeing. Information, educational programs and environmental cultural shifts are occurring in all aspects of society from medical environments to educational institutions to work environments.

While there are many different methods of assisting persons experiencing trauma it seems essential to first understand the core concept of trauma and the accompanying loss experienced.

Simply defined a trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. It is an event or experience that disrupts our ability to function. A trauma can be singular or repetitive. When anyone experiences a trauma there is an accompanying experience of loss; "the state of being deprived of or of being without something that one has had". The lost can be physical, psychological, emotional or a combination of all three components.

Often people cope with the trauma and accompanying loss with little ongoing support or assistance. Certain accepted and recognized traumatic events have defined protocol which are implemented. These include medical procedures, natural disasters, abusive situations. But even in these situations support is short term. Resources are available through support groups, therapists and educational information but the day to day adjustment is often left to each person to navigate on their own.

To effectively create a "culture" of trauma awareness and appropriate ongoing support for all persons several essential components need to be implemented:

Professional Focus: To maximize resources and provide a comprehensive support system

- 1) Leading institutions such as medical, governmental and educational need to collaborate in determining definitions, protocols and program development in any and all environments seeking to create a "Trauma aware" culture.
- 2) All aspects of trauma impact need to be addressed in developing educational and treatment programs for the person who has experienced the trauma and those in relationship with the person. This includes understanding the trauma experience, all the losses related to the trauma, the grief process experienced following the trauma, methods of supporting healing from the traumatic experience and the integration of a relationship- based support system.

Individual Focus: Recommendations when supporting a person or persons who have experienced a trauma and corresponding losses:

- 1) Listen with an accepting and caring approach
- 2) Refrain from judging, being critical or telling the person how to feel or act
- 3) Educate yourself on the impact of trauma and loss
- 4) Encourage seeking trauma related resources and professional support, as appropriate

