

BLUE KNOT FOUNDATION

FACT SHEET:

Trauma Response



- Trauma is extreme stress. The extreme stress of trauma overwhelms a person's capacity to cope. It is a response to threat or the perception of threat.
- Events which are a threat or perceived threat to our survival are traumatic but not all traumatic events are life-threatening.
- When our nervous system perceives a threat our stress response is activated. With trauma, this can happen over and over again. We can be triggered easily because trauma leaves us on 'high alert' for danger.
- With repeated trauma our stress response can stay switched on. This can make it harder to return to a resting state of calm.
- With trauma, especially complex trauma, we also react more to everyday stress. Even minor stress can trigger 'out of proportion' responses. This is because the body continues to react as if we are still in danger.
- A threat or trigger sets off the stress response. There are lots of possible triggers. Some triggers stimulate our senses – smells, sounds, sights, touch, tastes. Other triggers come from cues in our environment.
- Different people have different triggers. Some people are repeatedly 'triggered'. It can be hard to identify a person's trigger/s. It can be hard for the person as well as for the people around them.
- When a person's trigger is not identified, their reaction can seem to happen for no apparent reason. Triggers and trauma reactions can be hard to understand. Because reactions to triggers are hard to understand they are often misinterpreted.
- When people's reactions are misinterpreted, their behaviour can seem very challenging. Other people often judge and punish survivors of trauma for their reactions and behaviours.
- When other people think about behaviour as a survival response it is easier to empathise with the person, understand their behaviours and support their healing.

