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Is It Me? Is It My Partner? Maybe It's The Trauma! 4 Ways Trauma Can Affect Your Relationship

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Living through a traumatic event; such as assault, being under threat, an accident, or the death of a loved one; can affect what you think, how you feel, and what you do. You might find yourself having invasive thoughts or memories of the event, nightmares, or you may be finding it difficult to concentrate or remember things. You could be feeling fear, numbness, depression, guilt, irritability or panic. And physically you may feel over alert, easily startled, exhausted, have general aches and pains, have difficulties sleeping, or you may find yourself withdrawing from your normal activities. Dealing with the aftermath of a trauma can be really challenging. And, if you're in a relationship with a significant other, you may (or may not) have realised that the trauma you experienced can impact upon your relationship too ... sometimes not in a positive way.

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If you're having difficulties within your relationship, the four common reasons below might help you understand why ... and what you can do differently. *Just a side note – in writing this I'm assuming your relationship is not the source of your trauma.*

1. It's normal to **withdraw** from those you love, and life in general after a distressing event. All the thoughts and feelings you're having may be overwhelming you, and if

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may feel much easier to isolate yourself (for fear of hurting others, getting upset, or being reminded of the traumatic event). However, while some alone time can be useful to process what you've been through ... too much alone time can make you feel unconnected, isolate you from people you love, and increase your feelings of shame, hurt, and powerlessness. So, even though you may be finding it difficult to be around others, try to stay connected with your partner by communicating with them – sometimes about what you're thinking and feeling about the trauma, sometimes just asking them how their day has been and how they are. Communication can help you process the trauma, and it can help to bring back some normality in what may feel a very abnormal world.

2. Being **triggered** by reminders of the distressing event is the brain's way of trying to protect you from harm again. While this can be useful, if your brain starts to tell you that what was previously safe is now "dangerous"; such as leaving your house, going out at night, or your loved one touching you; these false triggers can start to affect your life and your relationship. It can be useful to remind yourself that you're safe, that you trust your partner, and to talk about what is going on for you. By telling yourself that you're safe and that you trust your partner, you're trying to recreate a sense of safety and power that may have been shattered by the trauma. By communicating to your partner that you're finding things difficult, you're helping them to understand more about what's happening for you, and you're giving them a chance to walk with you and support you as you heal.
3. You're **quicker to react**, often in frustration and anger. Traumatic events can leave you with a sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, and guilt. They can also leave you feeling exhausted and with little energy reserves. And they can change the chemicals in your brain. No wonder small things set you off more often! You may be

trying to regain power or a sense of control, you may not have enough energy to reason with your thoughts and feelings, and your brain might be a chemical soup making rational thought so much harder. Engaging in relaxation and mindfulness exercises are extremely important after a trauma. They help the body to move out of the 'fight/flight/freeze' response (even if only for a few moments), they help to brain start to see that not everything is a threat, they can change the chemical make up in your brain, and they may even help you sleep better. All in all, a great antidote to frustration and anger.

4. You're scared of being **intimate** again. You may feel fearful of your partner getting close to you – physically or emotionally; you may think that you're broken, damaged, or defective because of the trauma; you may feel unloveable; or you may be worried that if you let your guard down you'll get hurt. While these are common reactions after a trauma, withdrawing from intimacy can erode your relationship and add to the pain that you're already experiencing. Trusting your partner and rebuilding intimacy slowly through being in each other's company; talking, talking and talking; and safe touch can often be the cornerstone of recovery. Through rebuilding safety and trust in yourself and another, your brain will understand that you can rebuild safety and trust with others too.

Hopefully by understanding these four common challenges after a trauma and actions you can take, your relationship can survive, and maybe even thrive, after a distressing event.

However, if these strategies aren't enough, and the trauma you experienced is still affecting your life negatively, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

If you would like help in managing your thoughts, feelings or behaviours, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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