

# Talking About Trauma

## What to Know

There are many kinds of trauma, and no two people will react in the same way to any given trauma. Accidents, death, or violent acts are major traumas, but many teens experience ongoing distress related to less "obvious" traumas, like neglect, parents' divorce, bullying, verbal abuse, and so on.

Memories and feelings associated with any type of trauma can linger for weeks, months, years, and even a lifetime, unless they are addressed and processed. What does that mean? Experts agree that the one thing you *shouldn't* do is avoid the thoughts and feelings associated with trauma. Talking about the memories and feelings can be hard work and should be done thoughtfully, but the payoff is a clear mind, a lighter heart, and true healing.

Along with your memories and feelings, there are other things you might experience. Check off the statements that apply to you.

- Anxiety, fear, or worry about your safety or the safety of others
- Worry that the event will happen again
- Decreased attention, focus, or concentration
- Change in your academic performance (for example, you don't care about school anymore, or your grades are lower than they were before)
- Irritability with friends, family, or co-workers
- Angry outbursts or aggression
- Withdrawal from other people or activities
- School avoidance
- Increased physical problems, like headaches, stomachaches, or chest pains
- Constant thinking about or talking about the event and/or the details of what happened
- Over- or under-reacting to noise, physical contact, doors slamming, sirens, lighting, or sudden movement

\_\_\_ Nightmares or disturbing memories during the day

\_\_\_ Sleep problems (for example, you can't fall asleep, or you wake up a lot during the night)

\_\_\_ Avoidance of places that remind you of the trauma

\_\_\_ Emotional numbness - you have a hard time feeling *anything*

This worksheet is designed to help you identify how the trauma affected you, and you'll create a plan to help you process the thoughts and feelings associated with what happened.

### **What to Do**

Write a summary of the traumatic situation.

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In what ways have memories of the trauma affected your life? For instance, nightmares, sadness, anxiety, poor school performance, and so on.

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What feelings come up when you think about the trauma? For instance, sadness, fear, guilt, shame, anger, worry, and so on.

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What do you do to *avoid* the unpleasant feelings related to your trauma? For instance, lash out at others, numb out by scrolling through social media, and so on.

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What are your *fears* when you think about remembering and talking about the trauma? For instance, "I'd go crazy," "I would start to cry and never be able to stop," "I'd be so angry I'd want to kill people," and so on.

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Here are some ways to deal with traumatic memories instead of avoiding them.

**Talk to someone.** If you tend to avoid talking or thinking about your past trauma, you're not alone. It's OK to ask for help. Who can you talk to? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mindful breathing.** Pay attention to your breath. Notice the inhale and exhale. Notice where you feel the air go in—the nose, the mouth? Notice the rise and fall of your chest or belly. Let go of worry in the moment. If your mind wanders, bring it back to the breath. There are many apps, YouTube videos, and other resources to help you learn and practice mindful breathing. Deep, slow, breathing (belly breathing) can “trick” your brain into thinking you're relaxed. But if focusing on your breath triggers traumatic memories, shift your focus to something outside yourself such as colors, sounds, or objects in the environment.

**Meditate.** There are many types of meditation you can learn—some involve repeating a “mantra” or simple sound or phrase to yourself over and over while sitting in a comfortable position with your eyes closed. You can think of words like “peace” or “calm” or “relax.” Some forms of meditation don't require you to close your eyes, which can be uncomfortable for people with a trauma history. Check out the many apps available, such as [www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com), [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com), to name a few.

**Practice yoga.** Trauma can be stored in your body and cause distress. Yoga allows you to move safely and gently through various positions and stretches, which can help you become more aware of the connection between your mind and body, so you feel stronger and more empowered.

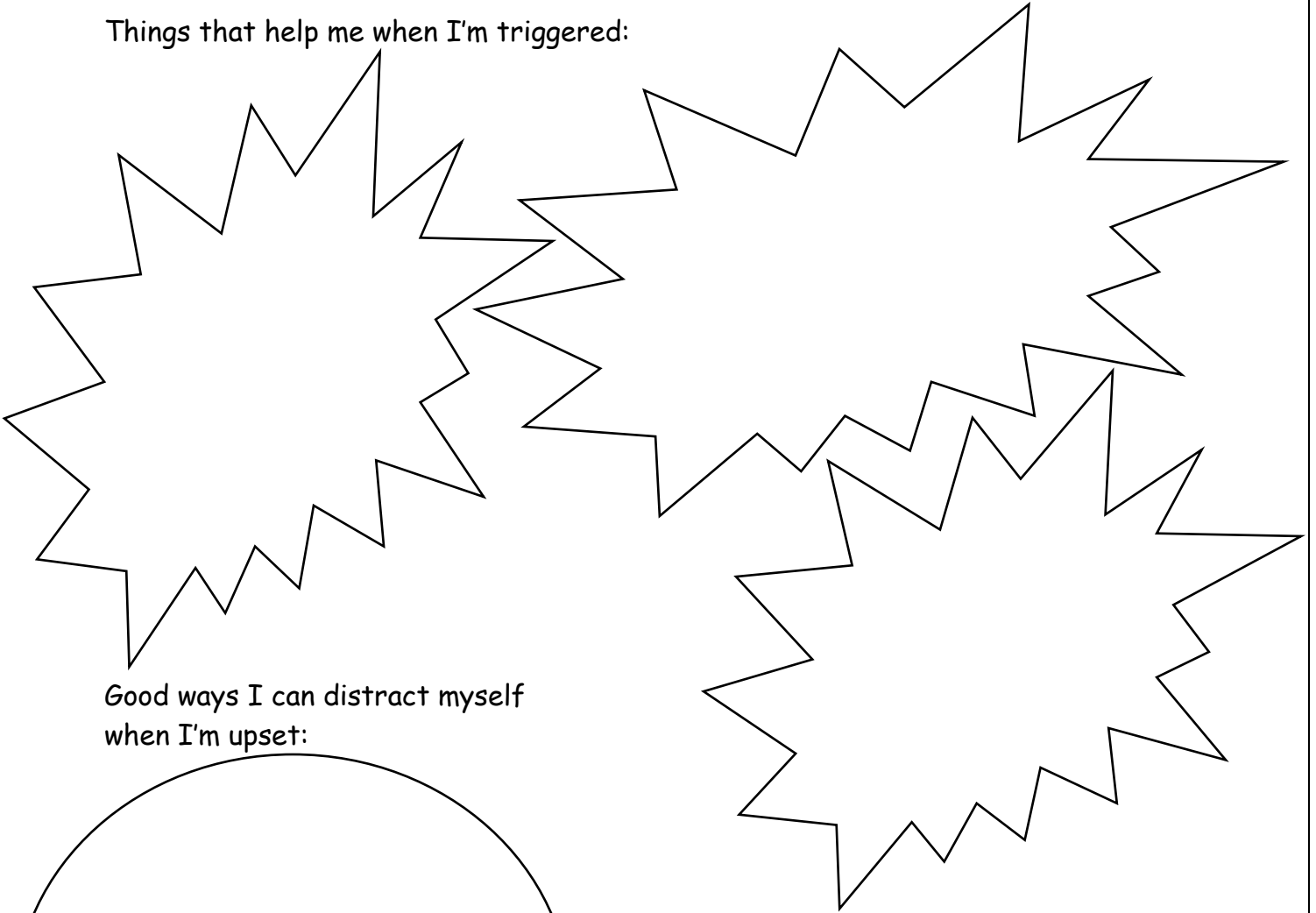
On the next page you'll create a plan for dealing with memories and feelings associated with the trauma. Share your plan with a trusted adult and place it somewhere where you can look at it when you're having a hard time.

\_\_\_\_\_ 's Coping Plan

I know I'm triggered when I:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Things that help me when I'm triggered:



Good ways I can distract myself when I'm upset:

\_\_\_\_\_

Safe people I can reach out to (name, phone #):

\_\_\_\_\_

How I keep myself safe:

\_\_\_\_\_