
HOW TO TALK ABOUT TRAUMA: 6 EASY STEPS

Aristophanes, philosopher:

“By words the mind is winged.”

Pierre Janet, pioneer trauma psychologist:

“unless the dissociated elements of the trauma [are] integrated into personal consciousness, ... [survivors are] likely to experience a slow decline in personal and occupational functioning.”

Whether it's talking about your trauma, or your PTSD experience, finding the words can be tough. It makes complete psychological and neurological sense that after trauma our normal language flow is interrupted. There are ways, however, to woo it back:

1 – Make a timeline – A large part of the disconnect in language is the sense of overwhelm we feel about how to tell the story, or even, what to tell. Begin finding language by chunking things down to size. Order events so that they become concrete. What happened first, then second, then third, and so on. Just write *what you remember*. The outline does not have to be perfect, coherent or complete.

2 – Outline your personal evolution – Finding language is easier when we have clarity. Start focusing the pictures you have in your mind. Note the details. Note the changes. Note the differences. Who were you before the trauma? During? Afterward? If you can't remember – imagine. Focus on what you *feel*; this is the crux of your experience.

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3 - Figure out what is most important - In talking about trauma it isn't necessary to talk about *everything*. It's the biggest moments that sear our souls. What do you most want to express about them? A couple of writing exercises:

- a. What I remember most is _____.
- b. The memory that hounds me most is _____.
- c. What bothers me most is _____.
- d. What I feel most strongly is _____.

Write as much as you can in a free flow - don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc. Just write, and when you stall, write the opening of the sentence again and again until a new idea comes up and you naturally finish the sentence. Set a timer. Write for 5 minutes, or 10, whatever feels comfortable to you.

4 - Learn to say the story out loud - Now that you've written out some ideas you have the basis for a script to tell your story, or a part of your story. Reread and edit, smoothing it out so that you fill in the gaps you feel exist. And then: *practice reading your script out loud*. The first time you hear the words in the air should not be when you are telling someone else. Get familiar with the sequence of sentences. Get comfortable with hearing the ideas out loud.

5 - Carefully choose who you speak to - We don't just tell our stories to any stranger. Consider who you will tell. Do you trust that person? Do you feel comfortable with them? Do you feel safe? You can even come up with some interview questions to ask a person before you divulge your story. *You are in control here; choose wisely.*

6 - Plan the logistics - More details in your control: Telling your story must be done in a safe place, where there is quiet, no distractions and a sense of security. When you are ready to share your story do it in a place conducive to sharing this news, where your audience can focus, concentrate and not be distracted.

Research suggests:

"one of the main motivations for writing and verbal expression... is the way such activity brings peace of mind and relieves stress." TIMES online

Be brave. You can do this. Language, like a muscle, can be built!