

# Supporting Your Mental Health After Trauma

During times of uncertainty and after traumatic events, we want to take extra care of our mental health at work and home. In the workplace, NAMI encourages people to bring their whole selves to work, and to do that, it's important to acknowledge our lives outside of the workplace and how non-work-related trauma can impact work.

## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

When you, or someone you know, experiences something challenging or traumatic, it's helpful to know how to respond. Learn about different trauma-related terms and how to appropriately use them here.

**Trauma** occurs when a person is threatened by or directly experiences an intensely distressing event, such as an assault or the death of a loved one. People experience trauma in different ways, even when exposed to the same traumatic event. Experiencing trauma may or may not result in a clinical diagnosis.

**Indirect trauma** occurs when a person sees or hears about a traumatic event from another person or on the news or social media. Frequently, a person who works directly with those who have experienced trauma will face indirect trauma, such as journalists, front-line workers, or first responders.

**Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS)** describes a typical, temporary response to a traumatic or highly stressful event. It includes reactions like feeling on edge, experiencing flashbacks or nightmares, and feeling temporarily disconnected. These experiences can naturally subside over time as individuals process the experience and regain a sense of safety.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is a clinical condition that may develop if a traumatic experience persists for more than a month and significantly interferes with daily life. PTSD is characterized by experiences that are more severe and persistent, including:

- re-experiencing the trauma (through intrusive memories or nightmares)
- avoidance of reminders of the event
- negative changes in mood and thoughts
- chronic physical or emotional pain, and heightened arousal (e.g., being easily startled or having trouble concentrating)

It is important to note, this term can feel stigmatizing to some and should not be used lightly. Learn more about [PTSD online](#).

## Tips for supporting your mental health during difficult times

### Recognize the world outside work

Start by recognizing what is happening in the world around you – and that it is likely impacting your well-being. Validating your own experience, as well as your coworkers' experiences, can help you feel less alone. Simply acknowledging that it makes sense to be impacted and feel stressed can provide relief.

### Raise awareness of concerning signs

NAMI provides a wide range of resources about the signs of mental health concerns, which may appear after a traumatic event. How those signs show up at work can differ from person to person, but signs often include changes in how a person feels, looks, acts, or thinks.

- **Feels:** excessive irritability, worry, or overwhelm
- **Looks:** confused, exhausted, or fidgety
- **Acts:** less engaged at work or socially withdrawn
- **Thinks:** difficulty concentrating or persistent negative thoughts

Everyone's experience is unique, and there is no "right" way to respond to trauma.

## Tips for supporting your mental health during difficult times

### Help create a psychologically safe workplace through language

While bringing up challenging or traumatic topics may seem intimidating, doing so can help everyone feel more supported and heard, strengthening your organizational culture. Creating a psychologically safe space to have these conversations is critical.

#### You can help with this by:

- Encouraging [non-judgmental language](#) from everyone
- Learning about your internal and external resources, like insurance coverage for therapy, access to an [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#), or reaching out to [NAMI's HelpLine: 1-800-950-NAMI](#)
- Seek out training about how to have [mental health conversations](#)
- Include a check-in question at the beginning of 1:1 conversations:
  - *"Before we get started, I wanted to check in to see how you're feeling with everything going on, and how I might best support you during this time?"*
- Avoid minimizing or dismissing a person's feelings, and use active listening techniques such as validation, giving your full attention, and appropriate body language such as facing the person and keeping screens off. Examples of what you can say to validate the person include:
  - *"It makes sense you feel that way."*
  - *"I imagine it is difficult to carry this right now, I am here to support you."*

### Additional resources

Make employees aware of available resources, including Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services, crisis hotlines, the NAMI HelpLine, community resources, and other sources for employees to learn about and manage trauma.

#### Resources:

- **988:** For a mental health or suicidal crisis, call or text 988, or chat online at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).
  - The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.
  - Press 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line
  - Press 2 for Spanish services
  - Press 3 for LGBTQI+ support
- **1-800-985-5990:** The Disaster Distress Helpline provides 24-hour, toll-free crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Visit [SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline](#).
- **NAMI HelpLine:** Open Monday-Friday 10 am ET – 10 pm ET, call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264), text "HelpLine" to 62640, email [helpline@nami.org](mailto:helpline@nami.org), or chat online at [nami.org](https://nami.org).
- **Find Your Local NAMI:** For community resources, support groups, educational classes, and more. Go to [nami.org/local](https://nami.org/local).