

# How Unprocessed Trauma Impacts Mental Health



## Trauma & The Brain

When a traumatic event occurs, the brain's fear and survival system (amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex) goes into overdrive. If the trauma is not processed, the brain may store it in a fragmented, unintegrated way, keeping the nervous system on high alert.

Even years later, triggers (e.g., a smell, a certain place, a relationship dynamic) can reactivate the threat response, causing emotional and physical symptoms.



## How Trauma Contributes to Anxiety Disorders

- **Hypervigilance:** The nervous system remains in a state of alertness, scanning for danger, leading to excessive worry and a sense of impending doom.
- **Intrusive Thoughts & Rumination:** Unprocessed memories or subconscious fears resurface as obsessive or anxious thoughts.
- **Difficulty Trusting Others:** Fear of vulnerability or being hurt again can create social anxiety or avoidance behaviors.
- **Somatic Symptoms:** Trauma-related anxiety may manifest physically (e.g., stomach issues, headaches, muscle tension).

## ❖ HOW UNPROCESSED TRAUMA IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH



### How Trauma Contributes to Depression

- **Emotional Numbing & Disconnection:** To cope with past pain, the brain may suppress emotions, leading to feelings of emptiness, lack of joy, or detachment from life.
- **Negative Self-Beliefs:** Survivors often internalise blame or shame (“It was my fault,” “I’m not good enough”), reinforcing depressive thinking patterns.
- **Avoidance & Isolation:** Avoiding reminders of the trauma (even unconsciously) can lead to withdrawal from relationships and activities, fueling depression.
- **Burnout from Chronic Anxiety:** When the nervous system remains in a prolonged fight-or-flight state, exhaustion sets in, contributing to low mood, fatigue, and hopelessness.



### How Therapy Can Help

Without processing and integrating the traumatic experience, the brain continues reacting as if the danger is still present. Therapy approaches like CBT, EMDR, and trauma-focused work help by:

- Reducing emotional intensity linked to trauma memories.
- Challenging and reframing negative beliefs.
- Teaching self-regulation techniques to manage anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- Allowing for safe emotional processing, helping the brain recognise that the trauma is in the past.

❖ If you feel ready to take the first step to address your own trauma, then please get in touch.