



Partner & Family Support Information

Trauma is any event(s) that overwhelms a person's capacity to cope. Here are some ways you can help make the process of recovery a supportive and healing experience.

Listen and don't judge their experience. Reflect what they are telling you. Validate any hard experiences they are sharing. The fact they are sharing means they trust you.

Lift pressure from them Healing takes time- It's important not to pressure or rush them. This will slow down progress. Dealing with past trauma is exhausting enough without someone asking "are you done yet?". If you feel urgency, this has more to do with you, than them.

Instead of saying

"How long is this going to take?" or "are you trying hard enough?" or "it isn't working"

Try

"I bet this is hard work for you" or "Good job" or "take your time to heal in whatever time you need, I am here"

Notice healing. If you find yourself criticizing or blaming them ask yourself what is going on for you that causes you to react this way? Blaming and criticizing might have been a part of their experience and will not assist them moving forward. Try pointing out healing moments instead.

Don't be dismissive or comparative. Telling someone 'it doesn't sound that bad' or "could have been worse" Or "I had it worse and I got over it" are unhelpful statements and will not help with progress. Your system is different to theirs and every brain responds differently to overwhelm, stress and trauma. Honour their own responses.

Allow them to express their feelings. Don't stop the expression of sadness or upset. Normalize these emotions as part of healing. Expressing grief and processing will come with emotions and is just part of the human experience. If you can't handle their expression, perhaps look at your own containment of emotions or avoidance.

Encourage their voice. Survivors often feel they have been asked to suppress their voice, it can be healing to learn to speak up again. Allow them to ask for needs, set boundaries or object to things that don't feel right to them.

Get your own support. Knowing how to regulate yourself is an important skill for anyone. Please ask yourself; How do my own worries and stress add to this? Am I avoiding my own history and putting all the healing work on my partner/ family member? Do I know how to stay calm and soothe myself? It is not your family member's job to soothe you with their recovery.

Learn signs of dissociation. Glazed over eyes, getting quiet, forgetting, switching to another mood quickly, averting their gaze, breathing rapidly or running away are signs to start grounding their nervous system (they can do this themselves with a calm good prompt from you)

Learn their triggers. People with trauma will all have different triggers, certain words, loud noises, conflict, your disappointment, yelling, silent treatment. Anything that mimics the trauma experience will bring their body right back. Get to know them so you can anticipate what might start panic. If they dysregulate around you often, ask if there is something you do that triggers this.

Learn grounding tools to guide your loved one through a panic attack and dissociation AND to help yourself. Check out this trigger tool for [helpful grounding tools](#)

Get couples or family counselling. The way a person has attached to people in the past might have been unsafe or inaccessible. Make new patterns of connectivity with each other. This is your job too, not all on the person recovering. Share the load 50/50. If you are having issues in your relationship together, this involves your reactions and behaviour too. Hold yourself accountable.

Ask about their needs. Particularly after therapy. Your attention, a hug, a chat, a long walk or time alone maybe helpful. ASK, and when they tell you, believe them. Days when we do EMDR are particularly tiresome. Think of ways you can be supportive.

Self Care. Make sure you are caring for yourself. Whether that is time with friends and family, walks, playing with a pet, therapy, sports, meditation, art or other. Your happiness and wellness matters! If you can be stable, it will only be of benefit to them too.

Red Flags that you need to get your own support

1. You blame the other person for all the issues in the relationship
2. You lash out verbally or physically
3. You are pressuring them for improvements
4. You apply diagnosis to them that haven't been assessed
5. You experience stress and anxiety frequently
6. You avoid them or give them the silent treatment
7. Your thoughts have negative bias towards them
8. You think they are faking it or exaggerating it
9. You abandon them in times of stress
10. You try and control their behaviour
11. You freeze when they get overwhelmed

These reactions are not your fault, and definitely not their fault either. But they must be addressed. These reactions are clear signs you are not okay and need help. These are common reactions of people who are struggling with their own mental health issues and trauma that have origins from before you knew your partner or family member. As your brave family member gets support, please do the same.

This information has been adapted from Helpguide.org, World Health Organization and American Psychological Association. In-between Session tracking