

# UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Think of trauma as the emotional aftermath of life's most distressing experiences. It's what happens when you go through something profoundly challenging, be it a sudden loss, a tragic event, or

At times, you may find yourself experiencing flashbacks of events that really impacted you.

But, trauma isn't just a memory; it's the emotional storm that those memories bring. It can leave you feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or haunted by the past. Like a scar on your psyche, trauma shapes your thoughts, emotions, and actions.

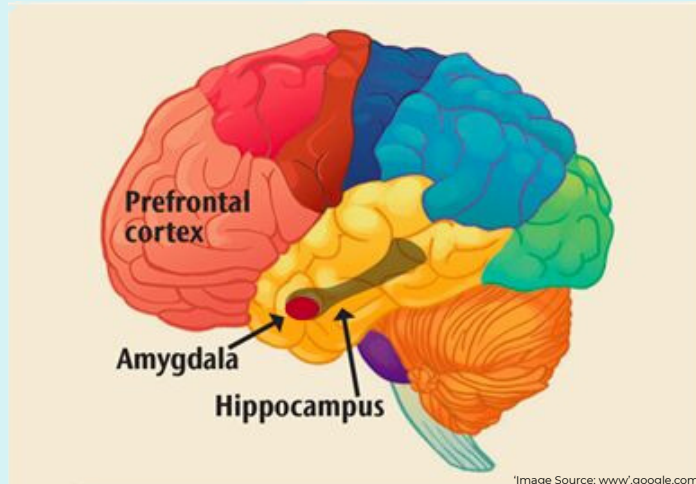


## ***So what is trauma really?***

Trauma is your brain's response to an intensely negative event(s), whether directly or indirectly experienced. It significantly impacts your emotional and physical well-being.



## When You Experience a Traumatic Event: What's the Brain's Response?



### Prefrontal Cortex:

Highly developed part of the frontal lobe that plays a role in the regulation of complex cognitive, emotional, and behavioural functioning.

### Amygdala:

The emotional center of the brain

### Hippocampus:

Involved in forming, storing, and processing memory

Imagine your brain as a control centre with different departments responsible for various tasks. **When it comes to trauma, there are two key players: the 'Amygdala' and the 'Prefrontal Cortex'**

- **Amygdala:** Think of the Amygdala as your brain's emotional firefighter. **When trauma occurs, it sounds the alarm and springs into action. It triggers a flood of emotions, like fear, anger, or sadness.** These emotions can be overwhelming, and it's like the firefighter setting off all the alarms in your brain at once.
- **Prefrontal Cortex:** **Now, picture the Prefrontal Cortex as your brain's logical thinker.** It's the part of your brain that helps you make rational decisions and regulate your emotions. **But when you experience flashbacks of traumatic episodes, it struggles to keep up with the intense flood of emotions from the Amygdala.** It's like trying to have a calm, structured conversation amidst a chaotic, noisy room. As a result, your memory can become fragmented, and your emotional regulation may go haywire. You might have trouble thinking clearly or making sense of what's happening.

So, in simpler terms, during trauma, your emotional mind goes into overdrive, while your rational mind struggles to maintain order. This can leave you feeling overwhelmed and make it challenging to process the experience.

Each person has a unique experience with a traumatic incident. Sometimes, they may be **Big T** experiences that shake the foundation of your life and leave deep emotional wounds. And sometimes, they may be **small t** experiences that distress you and accumulate over time, affecting your well-being.



## ***Now, let us help you understand:***

### ***Big T vs. Small t Traumas***

**Big T:** These are events that most people would find traumatic. This type of traumatic experience usually involves a threat of or actual physical injury, violence, or death.

For example:

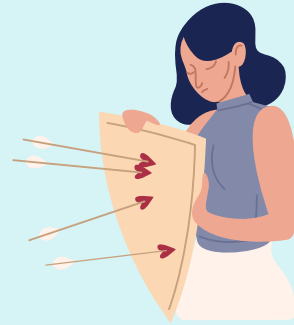
- Surviving a severe car accident.
- Enduring a natural disaster like a hurricane, earthquake, or flood.
- Serving in a war zone with exposure to combat and loss.
- Experiencing a life-threatening medical condition or major surgery.
- Coping with the loss of a close family member or friend.
- Surviving a violent assault or witnessing a violent crime.



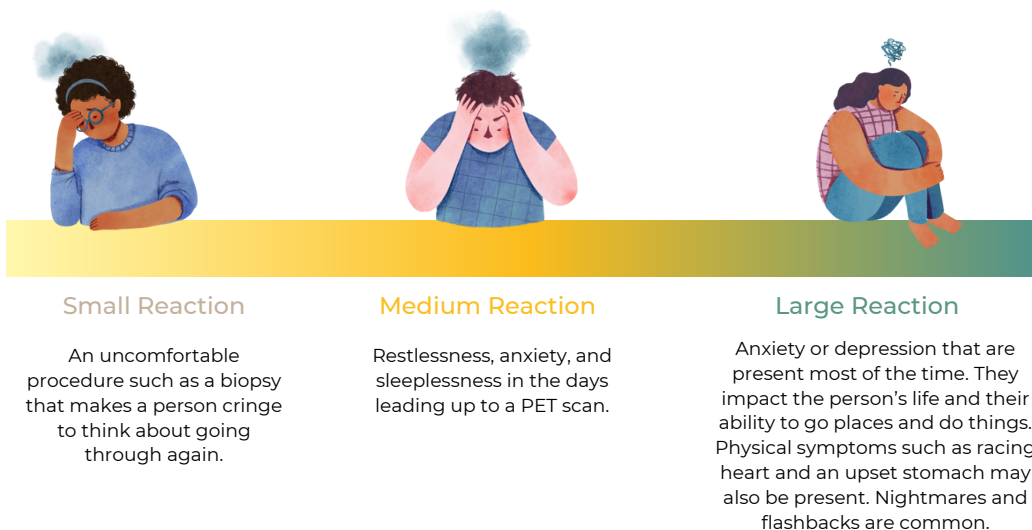
**Small t:** These are events one experienced as traumatic at a personal level. These events may not necessarily be life-threatening but they can have an adverse impact especially if they occur repeatedly over a period of time and during critical developmental periods like childhood or adolescence.

For example:

- Going through a breakup or divorce.
- Facing harassment or discrimination
- Financial stress
- Legal issues
- Being fired
- Being bullied
- Being cheated on
- Being neglected or emotionally abused



## ***The Trauma Spectrum: Why our experiences may vary?***



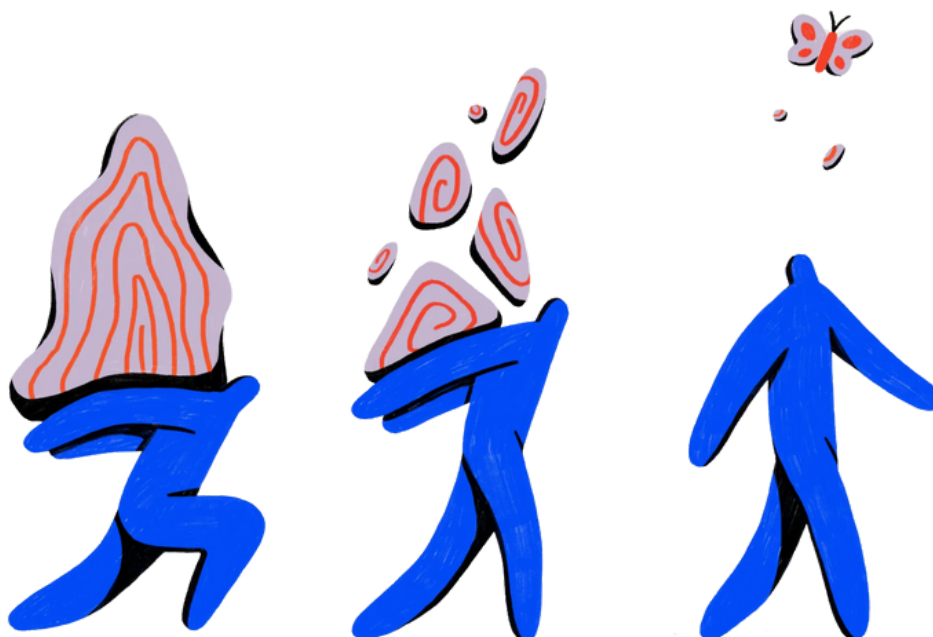
Picture trauma as a bit like a musical scale. Just as different musical notes create unique tunes, each of us experience trauma differently. A lot of times, the impact of traumatic experiences, whether Big T or small t may vary because of:

**Resilience:** Resilience is our overall capacity to use coping skills, strengths and resources to adapt successfully to life's challenges. In some ways it is like a volume knob. Some people have it turned up high, making trauma less overwhelming. Others might have it lower, so the impact feels louder and more intense.

**Coping Mechanisms:** So, while some may have a whole orchestra of coping mechanisms at their disposal to manage and process trauma, others have just a single instrument, making it more challenging to find harmony.

**Past Experiences:** Just like the tuning of a musical instrument can directly affect the way the instrument sounds, your past experiences can affect your present too. If the tuning goes awry, it affects all the subsequent songs that get played. Similarly, your past experiences can set the tone for how you approach and deal with situations too.

Hence, what may be a small t trauma for one individual could be a Big T trauma for another, underscoring the subjective nature of trauma's impact. This makes it crucial to approach your own and each other's traumatic experiences with empathy and recognize that we all paint our life experiences differently.



'Image Source: [www.self.com](http://www.self.com)'

Here's the thing: just as a wound can heal and become manageable with time, so can the impact of trauma. With the right kind of support, you can work through it and rebuild a calmer emotional landscape. Remember, you're capable of weathering the effects of life's toughest moments when you feel ready for it. And, should you need any help, we are here for you.

If you, or someone you know is looking to seek professional help, reach out to us at **The Mood Space** <https://www.themoodspace.com/getstarted> and our Care Team will get back to you within 24 hours.

Not looking for professional help just yet? We understand, keep browsing through our Care Space tools and explore our self-help handouts and worksheets to navigate mental health-related challenges in a better manner.

