

*I'm Going Crazy!      OVER-REACT*  
**Wrong**     *Can't relax*     Panic attacks     **Always nervous**  
Can't think straight     *Night terrors*     Flashbacks     **Anxiety**  
**Always Sad**     *Mood swings*  
**Feel everything**     *Never Comfortable*  
Unworthy     *Angry*     **Hate crowds**  
**Can't stay sober**     *Sleep a lot*  
Never trust     **Controlling**     **Scared**     Can't sleep  
*Unfocused*     **Feel damaged**     *Can't be alone*  
Sick a lot     **Numb**  
Can't feel     **Chaos**     **PAIN**

***What's Wrong with Me?***

**It's not about what's wrong with you.**  
***IT'S ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU!***

**If you get punched, you expect bruises. If you get an emotional or mental or physical punch, the bruises are also mental, emotional and spiritual.**

**You are not crazy –  
it's a natural response to the chaos of violence.**

***It's about trauma.***





## What is Trauma?

Trauma is a result of violence. Trauma happens when we experience a **violent event** or continuing situation that **threatens our life or mind, and** we're **so overwhelmed we can't cope or regain our balance**. For people experiencing domestic violence, trauma can be pervasive and ongoing.

Historical and intergenerational trauma can affect individuals and communities across generations. We can inherit the effects of trauma from our ancestors and relatives that survived genocide, colonization, boarding school violence, etc. It's in our DNA.

### There are many kinds of Trauma including:

- Childhood sexual, physical, emotional abuse, neglect
- Domestic and sexual violence (includes witnessing)
- Violence against Native women
- Violent crime (includes witnessing)
- Severe injury or illness
- Racism, sexism and other oppression
- Poverty
- War/terrorism/combat
- Community and school violence, bullying
- Hate crimes
- Historical and intergenerational violence
- Natural disasters
- Invasive medical procedures

### People Respond to Trauma Differently

Everyone experiences trauma, but we all respond differently. Some have chronic pain and illnesses. Others may turn to drugs or alcohol to deal with the pain of violence and trauma. What starts out as a survival tool or coping mechanism may turn into an addiction that can add another layer of trauma.

Some people recover from trauma quickly. Sometimes trauma reactions last for weeks, months or a lifetime.

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## **Trauma Effects the Way Your Brain Works!**

Trauma can cause real physical changes to the brain. It's a normal and natural response to trauma.

Our brains are built to help us survive life threatening experiences. When our lives are threatened our brains automatically go into a "fight, flight or freeze" reaction. We don't think about it - it just happens so we can survive. Sometimes our brains kind of get stuck in these reactions even when we're safe. It makes past trauma feel like it's happening now.

Trauma can affect our capacity to trust other people making it harder to reach out for help, to trust ourselves or experience ourselves as deserving and worthwhile. Trauma can make it difficult to solve problems, make decisions and to stay present and connected to others.

Some trauma reactions include:

- Problems telling your story
- Can't remember; memories are "snapshots" and/or disorganized
- Scan for danger & hyper-alert; never feel safe
- Numb, check out mentally or emotionally
- Negativity, "crabbiness"
- Constantly anxious or depressed
- Can't focus or concentrate
- Anger and over-reactions
- Substance abuse
- Hard to feel relaxed, joy, happiness

## **Native People Are Resilient! Healing Is Possible!**

Resilience is about knowing our survival is for a purpose. We carry also intergenerational resilience. Our ancestors are with us - we carry their strengths and survival skills in our DNA!

- Many survivors create healthy, powerful lives. It's important to know:
  - The violence is not your fault. You didn't cause or deserve it.
  - You have the right to heal in your own way and time.
  - Safety - If people aren't safe, recovery is difficult or impossible.
  - Violence doesn't define you. You have many skills and abilities.
  - You are not alone. Most of us are survivors of many traumas.
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## Indigenous Ways of Healing

- We do not heal alone. We heal together. Find at least one person you can trust - who listens, is nonjudgmental, caring and believes you
- Indigenous natural medicines like sage, cedar, water
- Prayer, ceremony
- Be in nature
- Laughter is a strong medicine!
- Eat healthy
- Deep breathing helps relieve anxiety and balances mind, emotions and body.
- Move! Dance, walk, stretch, run
- Listen to music. Sing! Traditional music is healing.
- Meditate. This is hard if you have anxiety. You don't have to sit still.
- Practice "mindfulness." Beading, sewing are mindful practices.
- Ground yourself. Focus on your toes or hands, a tree, birds, etc.- notice texture, temperature, smells, color, weight.

*Note:* There may be other causes for what looks like trauma reactions or can make the trauma reactions worse such as sleep deprivation, traumatic brain injury and vitamin deficiencies.

In addition to seeking out family and community support networks, and cultural/spiritual support, a counselor or therapist can be very helpful. Not all therapists are trained in trauma-informed approaches so it is good to ask if they are. If you're not comfortable with them, find someone else. Your local domestic violence program may have recommendations.

For more about trauma, contact the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center ([niwrc.org](http://niwrc.org)), or the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health ([nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org](http://nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org)).

### **Contact your local domestic violence advocacy program for support and more information**

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