



Communal Trauma in the Time of COVID-19

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What is trauma/communal trauma?

Trauma is a psychological, emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing.

Everyone processes a traumatic event differently because we all face them through the prior experiences in our lives.

Trauma can be:

Acute from a singular incident (a tornado)

Chronic (living with an abuser, living in a refugee camp)

Complex (layers of trauma).

Trauma is dysregulating to the body and especially the nervous system. It affects us physically, emotionally, cognitively, spiritually, and socially.

What happens to us in trauma?

Super over- simplified brain info

- lizard brain/survival brain (amygdala): It regulates physical survival and maintenance of the body. Breathing, digestion, heart rate, sleep. Fight, flight, freeze.
- Emotional brain (hippocampus): emotions, memory, feelings, hormone control, stress response
- Thinking brain (prefrontal cortex): problem solving, planning, compassion, imagination, attention, decision making.

These three are intricately linked and work together. When trauma, long term stress, crisis hits, all of this gets out of balance. We become dysregulated.

Symptoms/experiences of trauma

When we are in trauma, or experiencing long term stress, we can feel: exhaustion, confusion, anxiety, have trouble focusing, use poor judgment/thinking skills, be disorganized, forgetful, have sleep disturbances, experience digestive issues, feel agitated, feel “flat,” numb or want to “numb out,” be hyper vigilant, experience rapid breathing, feel panicky or shut down, feel helpless, overwhelmed, and.....

Stress vs. Trauma

Stress can be defined as a normal reaction to everyday pressures. Stress results in feeling overwhelmed when life feels unmanageable. Examples: job interviews, deadlines, finances, family responsibilities, etc.

Trauma is a sudden event that dramatically explodes into our lives and changes the way we perceive the world. A traumatic event is often life-threatening or perceived to be so. Examples: terror attacks, violence, natural disasters, the illness of a close friend or family member, accidents. Trauma can actually change the way our brain processes the world (this is not permanent).

COVID-19 and Communal trauma

Right now we are experiencing this as a global community. We are all affected by the pandemic (to varying degrees) and it is changing all aspects of our communal life (school, entertainment, work, shopping, faith communities, family events, life events, travel, sports, elective and routine medical care).

What is different between this and traumatic events like 9/11, Sandy Hook, or natural disasters is that our usual ways of coping by gathering together in person for comfort and worship are not available to us. We are physically isolated right when we most need community.

COVID-19 cont.

This also is a chronic situation as the length is uncertain and the changes are indefinite. We know life will not go back to what it was before, but we don't know what it will look like.

Stay at home is more exhausting and complicated than it sounds.

We came into this with our existing challenges of health, normal worries, family dynamics, etc. Multiple feelings and experiences in the same home.

Slow motion unfolding everyday.

Grief and Loss

Grief is the response to any loss. This is pervasive grief. We are grieving: deaths, normalcy, the assumptive world, losses (big and little, personal and communal).

Anticipatory grief: We are grieving the loss of our imagined future

(this is normal but can tip over into anxiety, worst case scenario thinking)

Ambiguous loss: loss that occurs without closure or certainty.

Communal responses to grief and loss

Together/separately we may be feeling: isolated, abandoned, powerless, feeling the contagion of fear, moral and cosmic rage, loss of assumed security.

We name the trauma and the losses so that, together, we can validate our experiences, remembering that we are not alone in this.

Vent - Validate - View of Hope (next slide)

Vent Validate View of Hope (together)

Vent: we need to be able to name our feelings, fears, losses. Tell our story. Declare our experience, not in comparison to others (not a contest).

Validate: we need acknowledgement that the disruption is real. We witness to the pain of others/as they do for us- shared work. Faith work of lament, trusting that God hears our cries.

View of Hope/Future new life: acting into what restores our balance. Rituals. See the opportunities to do a new thing. Living into the flow of life.

“If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together.”

Our Faith

Our biblical story reminds us that suffering, waiting, fear, sickness, and loss is a part of life. Some of our stories include:

Wilderness wanderings/Exodus story

Jairus' daughter

Jesus in the garden, Jesus in the desert 40 days

Lament Psalms: turn to God, complain, ask, trust

The disciples fled after the last supper

Holy Saturday

And so many more.....

Our faith cont.

We make sense of our story by placing ourselves into God's story. As people of faith we seek to making meaning out of suffering through reflection. This is important work. In trauma/crisis, meaning making comes later - cognitively we aren't there yet. My caution is that it is too early to make theological meaning at this moment (big picture reflection vs bite sized reflection). This is the moment for lament and compassionate presence.

We are called to find purpose, make a difference, and use our agency.

We can still find moments of hope and joy in each day.

Taking Care/Skills

During this time our task is to self-regulate the body, bring the brain into higher thinking, reset the nervous system, and speak to the heart.

Taking care of the body will help take care of the mind.

When we are in trauma, we can't think away our stress.

Go simple.

Present moment: what is real and true in this moment?

Take 5: Name five things in the room. There's a computer, a chair, a picture of a flower, an old rug, and a coffee mug. It's that simple. Breathe. Realize that in the present moment, nothing you've anticipated has happened. In this moment, you're okay. Use your senses and think about/notice how they feel.

Limit your news, or time of day you consume news

"Ouch, this hurts" practice.

Breathing exercises

Nature

Practice Self Compassion: 1) Self Kindness 2)Common Humanity / Child of God 3)Mindfulness

Self Kindness is treating yourself with the grace and care you would a loved one. Right now is not the time to be hard on yourself! Lower your expectations for yourself and others. Golden Rule.

Common Humanity/Child of God: We are interconnected children of God. The importance of staying at home is because we are interconnected. We are all both/and.

Mindfulness is being open to the reality of the present moment so that all can enter our awareness without resistance or avoidance. We can “be” with our feelings long enough to respond with care and kindness. (Jesus and Lazarus)

Purpose/Agency: What can you do and what can you control?
These are our holy callings right now: stay home, wash hands,
support nonprofits, pray for others, reach out.

Spiritual Practices: light a candle, pray, meditate, journal, read,
sing.

Stay connected with others. Call, text, write, email, video, highs
and lows, prayer partner. Listen, don't jump to problem solving or
diminish your experiences, share honestly.

Move your body: walk, exercise, tai chi, yoga, dance, yard work.

Eat mindfully and wisely (but with grace).

Your suggestions of what is helping at this time.....

Questions?

Write down two things/skills you know are helpful to you or that you will try.

For our prayer time...

Write down losses to bring to God.

Write down a fear.

Write down what is bringing you joy.

Write down where you see hope.

Good and gracious God, we come to you knowing that you know our thoughts, our feelings, our experiences and worries already. You know when we struggle and when we thrive. In your creative power we turn our days over to you, trusting that you continue to work in us, creating us new each day. Open your hearts and minds to your grace, to your abundance, and to your restorative work.

Lord, we have lost things - things that brought us joy and stability. Hear us, as we name them to you in our hearts...

Lord, we are scared. Scared of what we do not know and cannot control. Hear us, as we name our fears to you in our hearts...

Lord, in the midst of hard things we still see beauty, silliness, and creativity all around. Hear us, as we name our joys to you in our hearts...

And Lord, we are Easter people whether it feels like Easter or not. As your beloved we are people who know to look for your hope in all things. Hear us, as we name signs of hope to you in our hearts...

Into your hands, Gracious God, we place our lives. Give us your grace to take care of ourselves so that we can take care of others, sharing your love, multiplying your mercy, and increasing the hope of new life in our world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Resources

NAMIMN.ORG (good info on COVID-19 and mental health)

Warm line: 651-288-0400

Or text “support” to 85511

National Suicide Prevention Line 1-800-273-8255

Crisis text “MN” to 741741