

## How traumatic events affect children, young people and families, and how to create the environment for recovery

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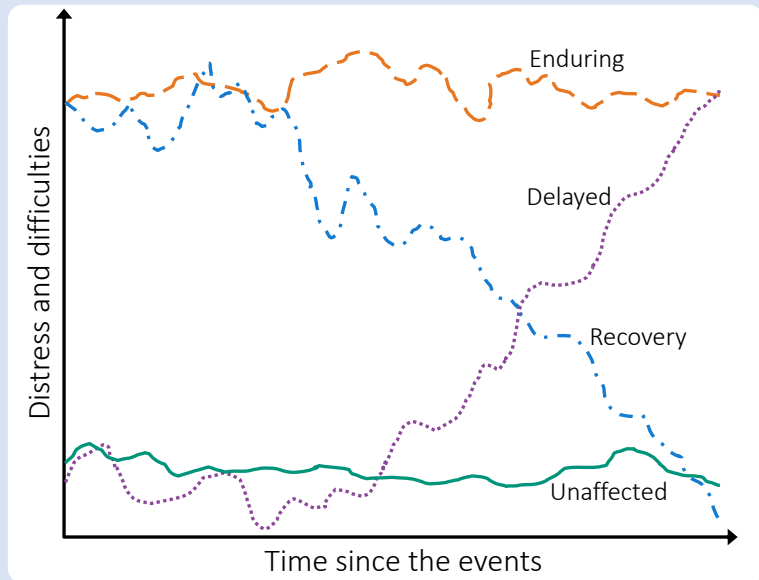
## Hopes and expectations

- **Inclusivity:** I hope that together we can create a space where all voices are heard and valued, where difference in all its forms is valued.
- **Language:** If I say anything that could possibly be hurtful, or discriminatory or undermining, please do tell me
- **Take care:** of yourself and each other. Because some of you will have experienced traumatic events
- **Making it real:** Please do bring to mind children and young people that you know who have experienced potentially traumatic events, and think about how this applies to them

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# Distress and difficulties following potentially traumatic events

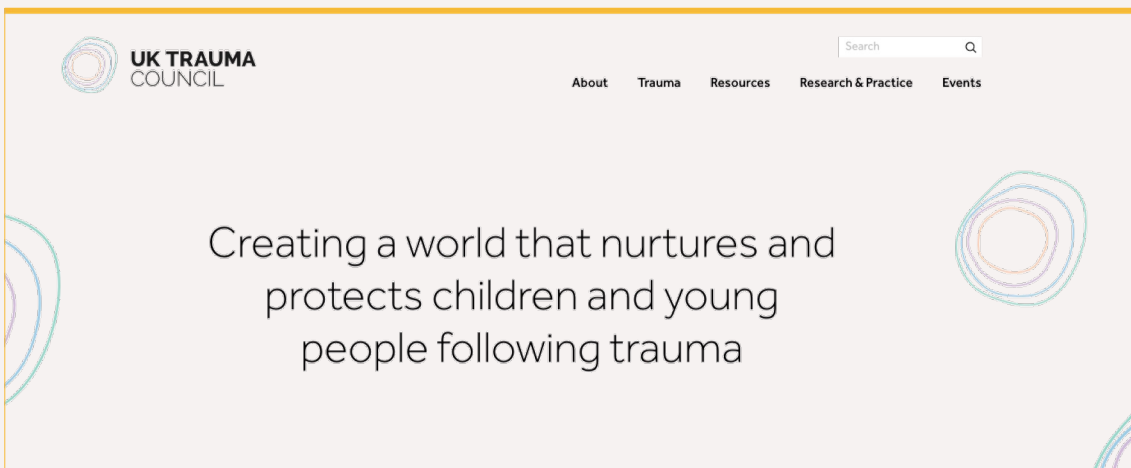
(from Bonanno 2004)



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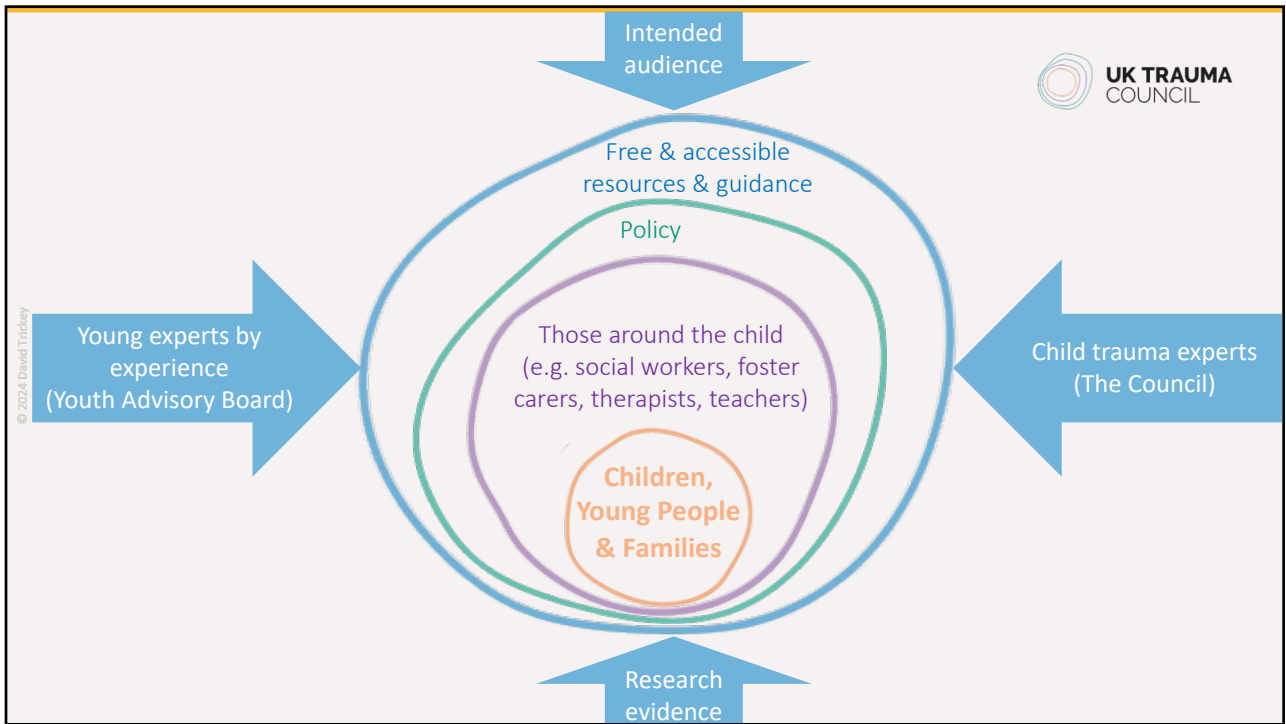
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Website: [uktraumacouncil.org](http://uktraumacouncil.org)



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UK TRAUMA COUNCIL

## UK Trauma Council Resources

- Resources include animations, guides, lesson plans, explainer videos etc.
- Current topics:
  - Childhood Trauma, the Brain and the Social World
  - Traumatic Bereavement
  - Childhood Trauma and PTSD
  - Childhood Trauma, War, Migration and Asylum
  - Critical Incidents in Educational Communities: Creating the Best Environment for Recovery

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# Other UKTC resources



- **Training:**
  - Traumatic Bereavement
    - School staff
    - Practitioners
  - Monthly Webinars
    - *Unpacking Complex Trauma* FREE webinar 16<sup>th</sup> May 5pm – 6.30pm (BST i.e. GMT+1)
- **Research & Practice:**
  - Videos (e.g. Epigenetics, ACEs)
  - Research roundups:
    - 6 monthly
    - Racism, Mental Health and Trauma
    - Developmental Trauma Disorder
- **Policy Guides:**
  - **Beyond the pandemic:** Strategic priorities for responding to childhood trauma
  - **Complex trauma:** evidence-based principles for the reform of children’s social care

<https://www.traumatransformation.scot/knowledge-skills/>



## What Makes Events Traumatic?

### *The Cognitive Model of PTSD*

(Meiser-Stedman, 2002)

One way of thinking about how trauma works:

- Memory
- Meaning-making
- Maintenance

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## Memories: Traumatic memories are different

(Brewin et al., 2010)



- **Vivid**: sensory 'data' of the event rather than the words of the story
- **Volatile**: very easily triggered or intrude spontaneously rather than when deliberately recalled
- **Fragmented**: disorganised pieces rather than complete coherent narrative
- **Here and now**: rather than there and then
- **Distressing**: the original distress is triggered often at the same intensity
- **Avoided**: rather than tolerated or welcomed

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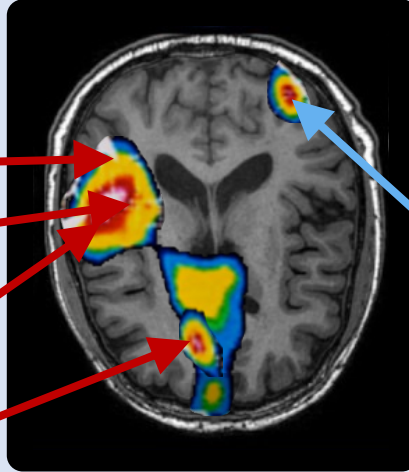
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# Memories and Brain Activation

(PET Scans; Rauch et al., 1996)

Only activated by trauma memories

Insula  
Amygdala  
Anterior Temporal Cortex  
Secondary Visual Cortex

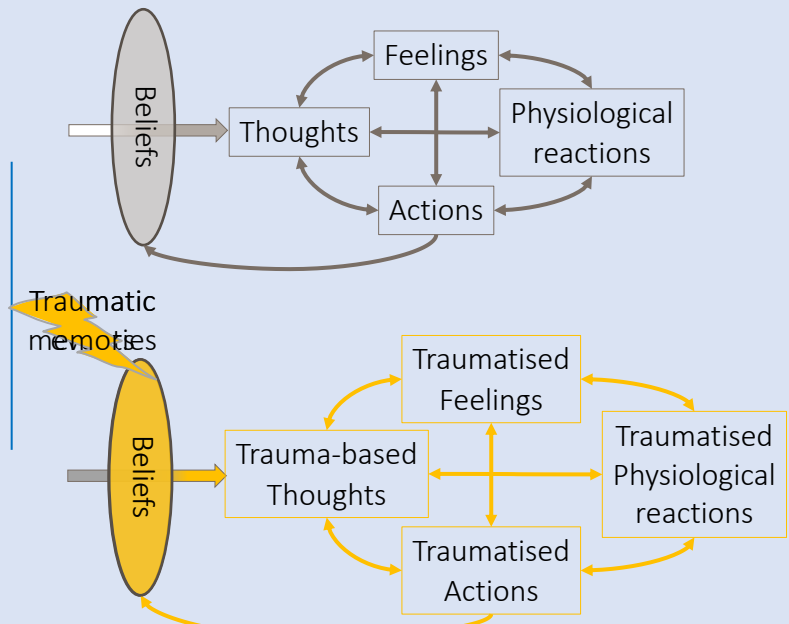


Only activated by neutral memories

Broca's Area

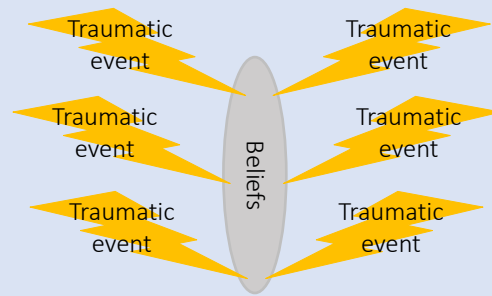
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Meaning:  
Traumatic events colour the way that we see things, even after the trauma



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Multiple Events  
– *shading* over  
time rather  
than shattering  
as a one off



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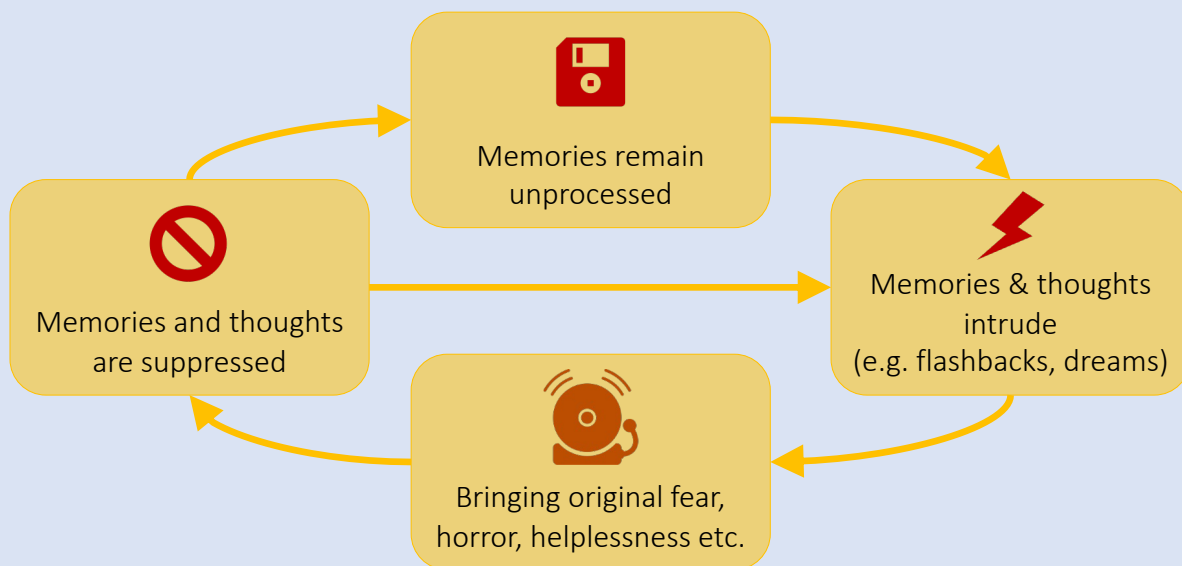
Common post-  
traumatic  
beliefs and  
thoughts

- Self
  - I'm no good
  - I deserve bad stuff to happen to me
  - I'm unlovable
- World
  - You never know what's going to happen
  - Everywhere is dangerous
  - Nothing makes sense
- Others
  - Others cannot be trusted
  - Others will hurt me
  - People I love don't stay
- The events
  - It was my fault
  - I should have stopped it

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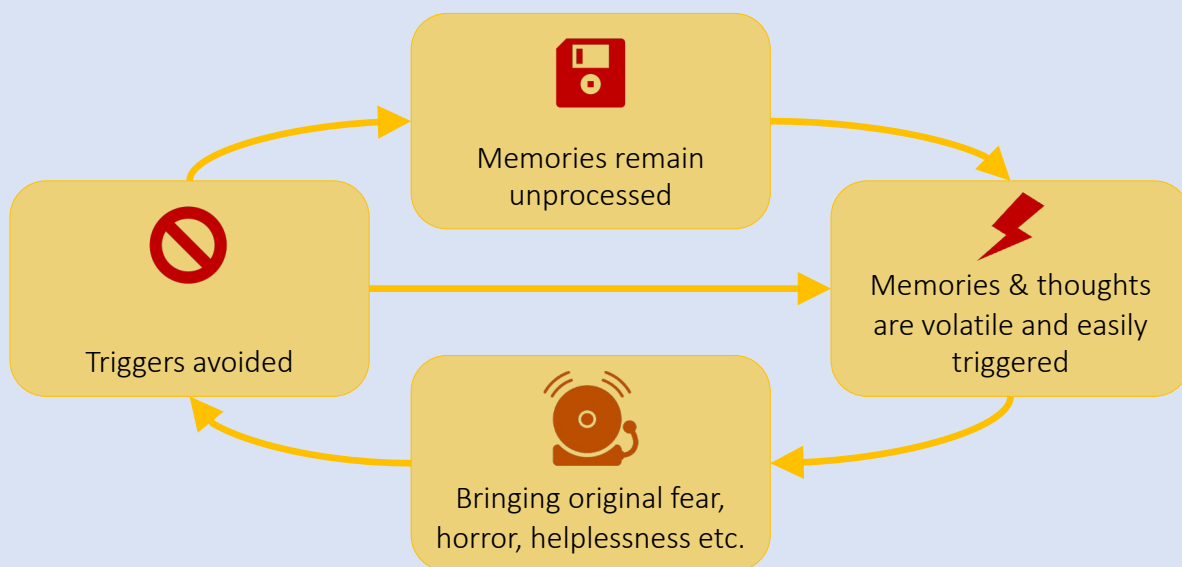
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## Avoidance of internal triggers maintains difficulties



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## Avoidance of external triggers maintains difficulties

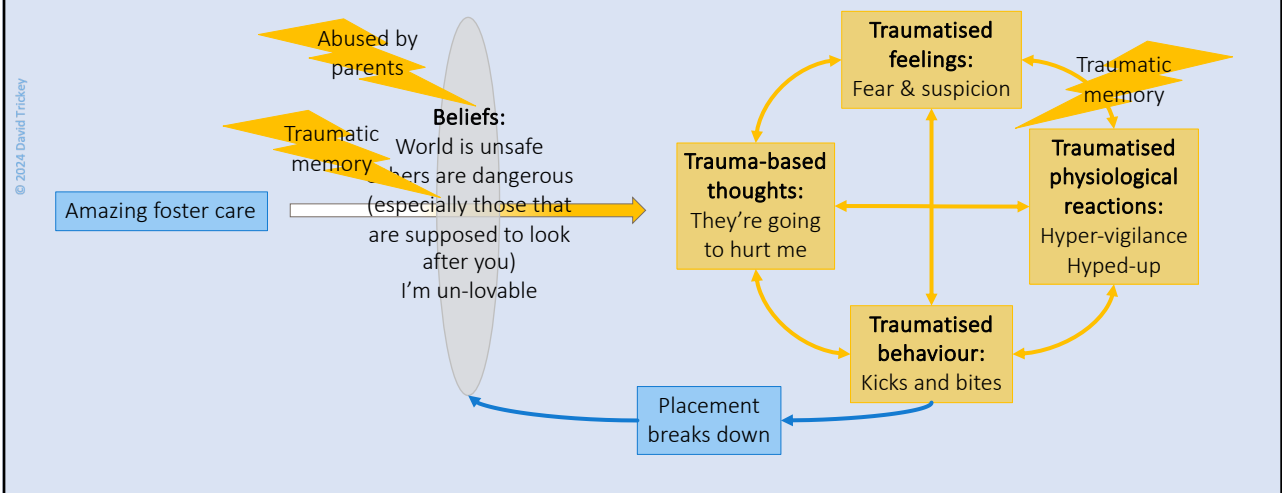


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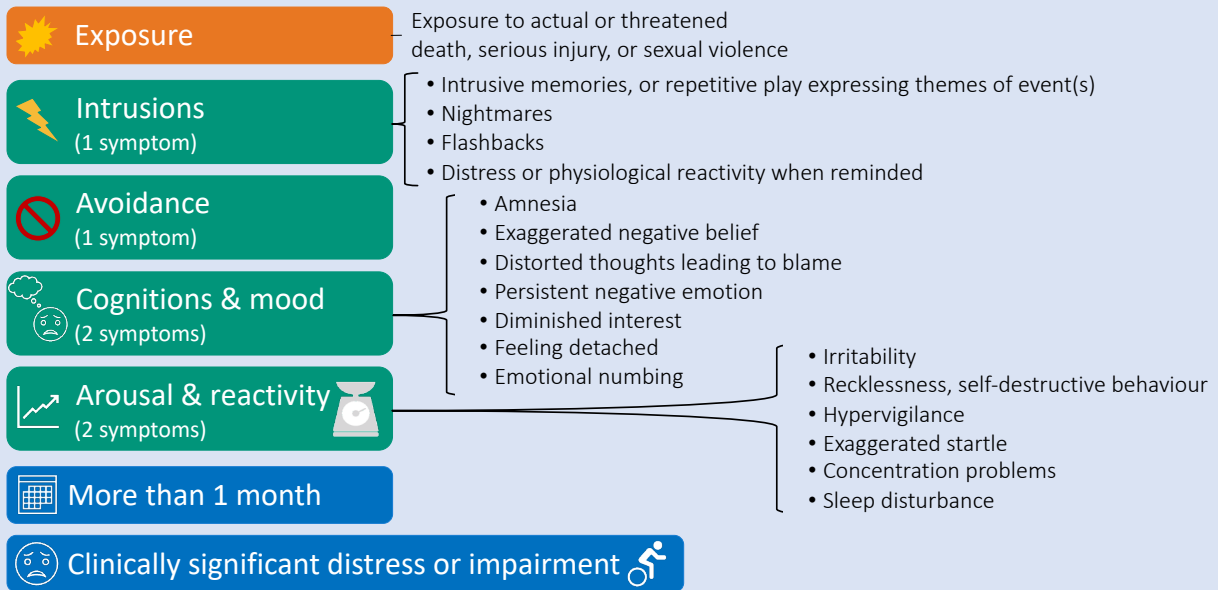
# Formulation: Sue (8) – Abuse, misappraisals

*“They don’t love me, she’s just doing it for the money, he’s gonna hurt me some time”*



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## PTSD (DSM-5, 2013)



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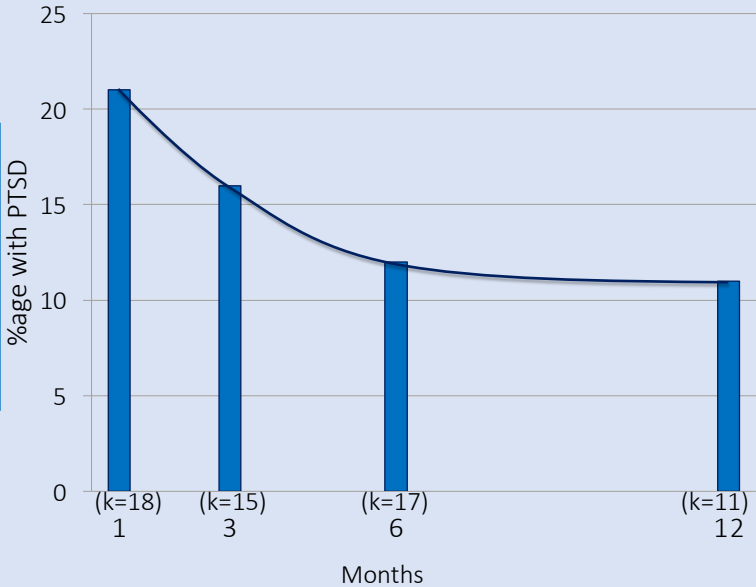
# The nature of intrusions

*“We do not dwell on the past ... the past kicks down our door, comes rushing in, grabs us by the throat and starts punching us...”*

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

# Recovery from PTSD

(Meta-analysis of 18 samples, all High-income economies, ethnicity not reported; Hiller et al., 2016)

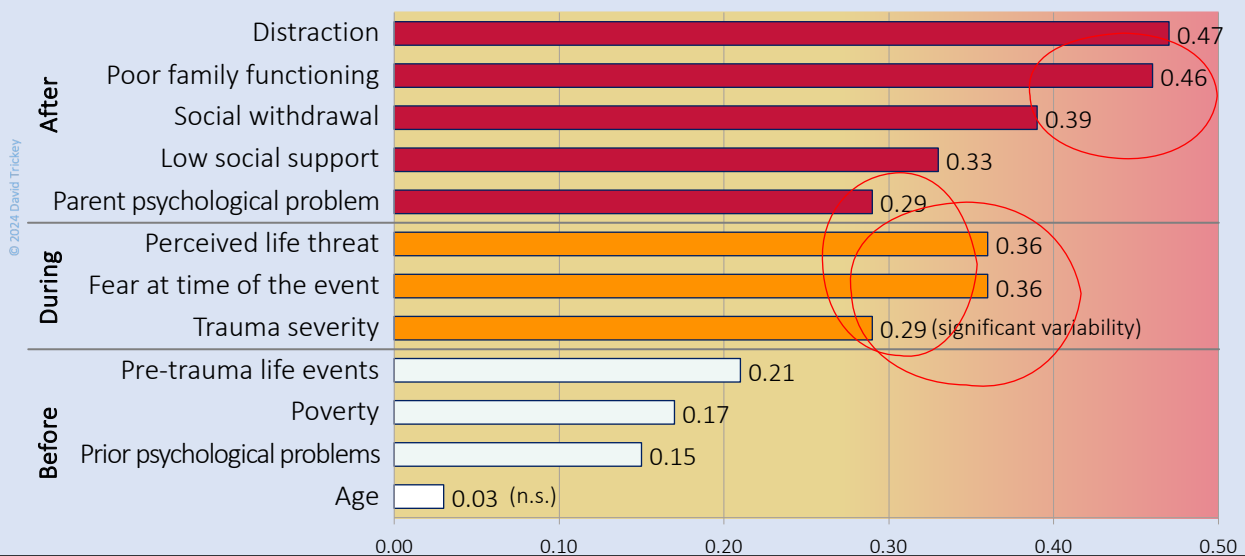


## Risk factors

- What sorts of things do you think make it more likely that someone will develop PTSD after a potentially traumatic event?

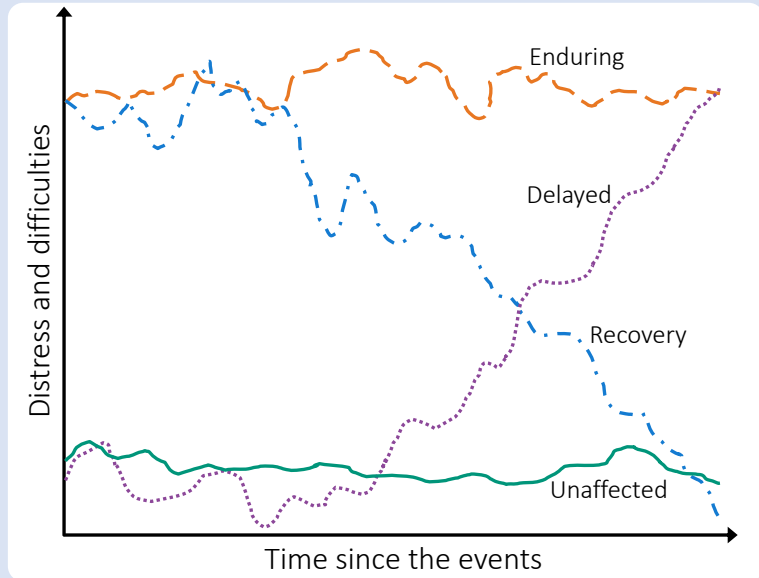
## Meta-analysis of Risk Factors for PTSD in CYP (Trickey et al., 2012)

64 studies, 32,238 trauma-exposed CYP, ethnicity recorded differently in different studies



## Distress and difficulties following potentially traumatic events

(from Bonanno 2004)



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## Five principles to guide the environment for recovery

(Hobfoll et al., 2007)

-  Sense of safety
-  Sense of calm
-  Sense of connection
-  Sense of control
-  Sense of hope

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## Sense of safety



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- Traumatic events can shatter a beliefs that the world is safe enough
- Meet basic needs first
- Establish routines and familiarity (they may be new, but they can still become routines)
- Manage expectations by making sure they know what's coming up
- Be trustworthy and reliable
- Maximise consistency (e.g. staff, classrooms, timings)
- Remain as calm, compassionate and curious as possible
- Minimise exposure to further trauma
  - Ensure safeguarding concerns are addressed
  - Monitor, limit, or at least discuss sources of information such as social media and news
  - Help children to make sense of the information to which they are exposed
- Make sure things are talkable about (processes memories and meanings):
  - Make time and opportunities to discuss past events and future ones
  - Don't force it, (unless there are some things that must be talked about)
  - Accurate information – appropriate to that particular child
  - Answer questions – appropriately to that particular child

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## Risks of *not* telling children and young people enough information

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- They may fill in the gaps
- They may over-generalise
- They may hear it from a source that seeks to sensationalise rather than re-assure (e.g. media)
- They may wonder whom they can trust
- They may assume that it's not ok to talk about it, and so are left with whatever account they stumble across
- They won't know how to counter inaccurate accounts

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## Sense of calm



- Traumatic events can leave people's state of alert on a high setting
- Social support (it may be enough just to have someone there)
- Explain and normalise traumatic reactions to staff, carers and children
- Work out with them what, or who, helps them to feel calm? (e.g. 'naming and taming', exercise, music, reading, colouring, playing?)
- Those working with or caring for children actually do this all the time with children – most are very good at it. But they might need to do it a bit more

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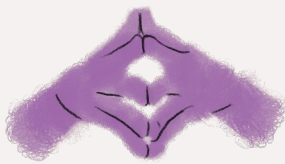
## Sense of connection



- Traumatic events can leave people feeling isolated and alone
- Research consistently supports social support and attachments as 'antidotes' to stress and trauma
- Work out who would be appropriate and useful sources of support:
  - Peers
  - Carers / parents
  - Extended family
  - Teachers, other school staff
  - Sports coaches
- Enhance opportunities for social support and connectedness (e.g. playing with, listening to, sharing experiences)
- Keep an eye out for those who are isolated and be wary of social rifts

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## Sense of control



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- Traumatic events can shatter a person's assumption that they have at least some control over what happens around them
- Collaborate and provide choices
- Be transparent about the reason when you can't go with their choice
- Teach emotional regulation
- Help children, classes, families, to do things for themselves rather than doing it for them

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## Sense of hope



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- Traumatic events can take away a person's hope for their future
- Don't dismiss or minimise their views
- Be curious and listen to any worries, and help them to rebalance their thinking
- Identify skills and strengths they have
- Draw attention to small steps taken
- Weave in some future focus

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## What else helps?

- Those around the children and young people making sure they are in the best possible shape to help them (including parents, carers, teachers, social workers, therapists etc.)

## Unpacking Complex Trauma

**FREE**  
UK Trauma Council  
webinar  
16th May  
5pm – 6.30pm  
(BST i.e. GMT + 1)

