

## **(Sexual) Trauma Indicators**

*Indicators of trauma are often contradictory. Most indicators can be considered “normal” reactions to stressors at one time or another. If clusters of indicators are present over an extended period of time, further investigation should take place.*

### Sleep Problems:

- Fear of being alone, particularly at night
- Fear of sleeping alone
- Fear of the dark
- Nightmares, night terrors (pursuit, torture, powerlessness and suffocation)
- Chronic insomnia

### Physical Problems:

- Swallowing and gagging sensitivity
- Repugnance to water on the face when bathing
- Constipation or diarrhea paired with other physical symptoms
- Feelings of suffocation
- Alienation from the body
- Easily startled by sounds or touch
- Failure to heed their own body signals
- Failure to take care of one's body
- Poor/distorted body image
- Manipulation of body size to avoid sexual attention
- Incongruent clothing
- Chronic minor illnesses (colds, etc.)
- Clothes which obscure or over-emphasize body
- Numbing out physically
- Chronic aches and pains – like headaches, stomach aches, backaches
- Lack of movement – particularly in therapy
- Rigidity of control around natural bodily functions
- Drug, alcohol or food abuses
- Body “memories”
- Increased anxiety during relaxation exercises
- Sudden heart palpitations or sweating

### Health Problems:

- Chronic gastrointestinal problems (IBS, colitis, nausea)
- Chronic gynecological disorders (even in children)
- Chronic venereal diseases or infections
- Chronic headaches, migraines, TMJ
- Chronic arthritis or joint pain
- Eating disorders
- Drug and alcohol abuse and addiction
- Compulsive behaviors
- Chronic migraines
- Fibromyalgia

### Sexuality Issues:

- Crying during or after sex
- Desire, arousal, orgasmic or erectile dysfunction
- Oscillation between asexual or compulsive sexual behavior
- Sexual codependency
- Feeling “dirty”
- Prostitution
- Indiscriminate sexual behavior

## (Sexual) Trauma Indicators

- Anonymous sexual encounters
- Fetishes and eroticism that mimics the abuses
- Sexual blackmail
- Sexually complicated relationships
- Sex perceived as “bad” or “powerful”
- Confusion about sexual identity (particularly if perpetrator was same sex)
- Sexual fantasies that usually have common themes that mimic the trauma
- Shame around sexual arousal themes
- Sexual arousal paired with fear, shame, guilt, powerlessness or power

### Emotional Issues:

- Suicidal thoughts, attempts and play (in children)
- Chronic depression, anxiety and phobias (particularly in children)
- Fear of “insanity”
- “Splitting”
- Self-abuse or mutilation
- Extreme grief and disorientation
- Inability to express anger
- Since there is no future
- Inappropriate anger (and rages)
- Numbing out emotionally– “1,000 - yard stare”; dissociation
- Chronic sense of powerlessness or out-of-control
- Extreme discomfort around mirrors
- Can discuss trauma with no affect (spurs disbelief from others)
- Inappropriate guilt; Shame
- Chronic avoidance of seemingly benign things
- Increased nervousness, numbness or depression when own child reaches the age the parent was when victimized
- Seasonal emotional cycles corresponding with the abuse (not related to S.A.D.)
- Feeling very young and vulnerable during stressful periods (often returns to the age when the abuse first occurred)

### Behavioral Issues:

- Extreme discomfort around losing control
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Need to be invisible
- Overcompensation with perfectionism
- Chronic people pleasing
- Chronic monitoring of words and actions
- Limited tolerance for happiness
- “Learned helplessness” (Seligman, 1975)
- Chronic solemnity or attention seeking
- Overt or covert revictimization
- Sense of dread
- Creation of crises
- Hypervigilance: strong startle response; extremely over-protective parenting
- Inability to take risks
- Chronic high-risk behaviors
- Aversion to making noise during crying, laughing or playing
- Patterns of powerlessness
- Hiding and cowering behaviors (even in therapy)
- Poor attention span
- Amnesia; “Gaps” in childhood memory
- Dissociation
- Phobias: suffocation and murder
- Chronic lethargy

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### Spirituality Issues:

- Rigid religiosity
- Extremely anti-religious

### Interpersonal Difficulties:

- Chronic issues around trust: inability to trust or indiscriminate trust
- Boundary rigidity or no boundaries (physically, emotionally, sexually)
- Extreme discomfort around conflict
- Strong fear of abandonment
- Inability to commit
- Themes of powerlessness
- Chronic choosing of unavailable mates or addicted partners (particularly with sexual issues)
- Conflict-laden relationships
- Repeating of family dramas
- Family is unsupportive of counseling
- Relationships do not grow gradually
- Strong sexual identity – difficulty when partner does not wish to be sexual

### Indicators For Children:

- Excessive school absences
- Strong desire to remain at school
- Chronic difficulty concentrating
- Sense of doom
- Chronic hiding (closets, cowering in corners, cabinets, etc.)
- Yeast infections with no apparent cause
- Regression
- Extreme shyness or reluctance around bathing, urination, defecation or changing of clothes
- Fear of certain people or a certain gender
- Stealing
- Fire-starting
- Bedwetting (without medical reason)
- Extreme worry in safety of others
- Chronic thoughts of death or abandonment
- Torture of animals
- Short attention span
- Age inappropriate acting out with or abuse of other children
- Promiscuity (pre-teen and teen)
- Frequent masturbation
- Overly compliant behavior
- Any chronic disturbance of eating, sleeping or other behaviors
- Unkempt
- Stained underwear
- Compulsive behaviors
- Age inappropriate sexual knowledge, sexual curiosity and sexual behavior
- Extreme fear of doctors and dentists
- Social withdrawal
- Powerlessness or pseudo-powerfulness