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# Trauma & FIRST RESPONDERS





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TRAUMA AND

# The Brain

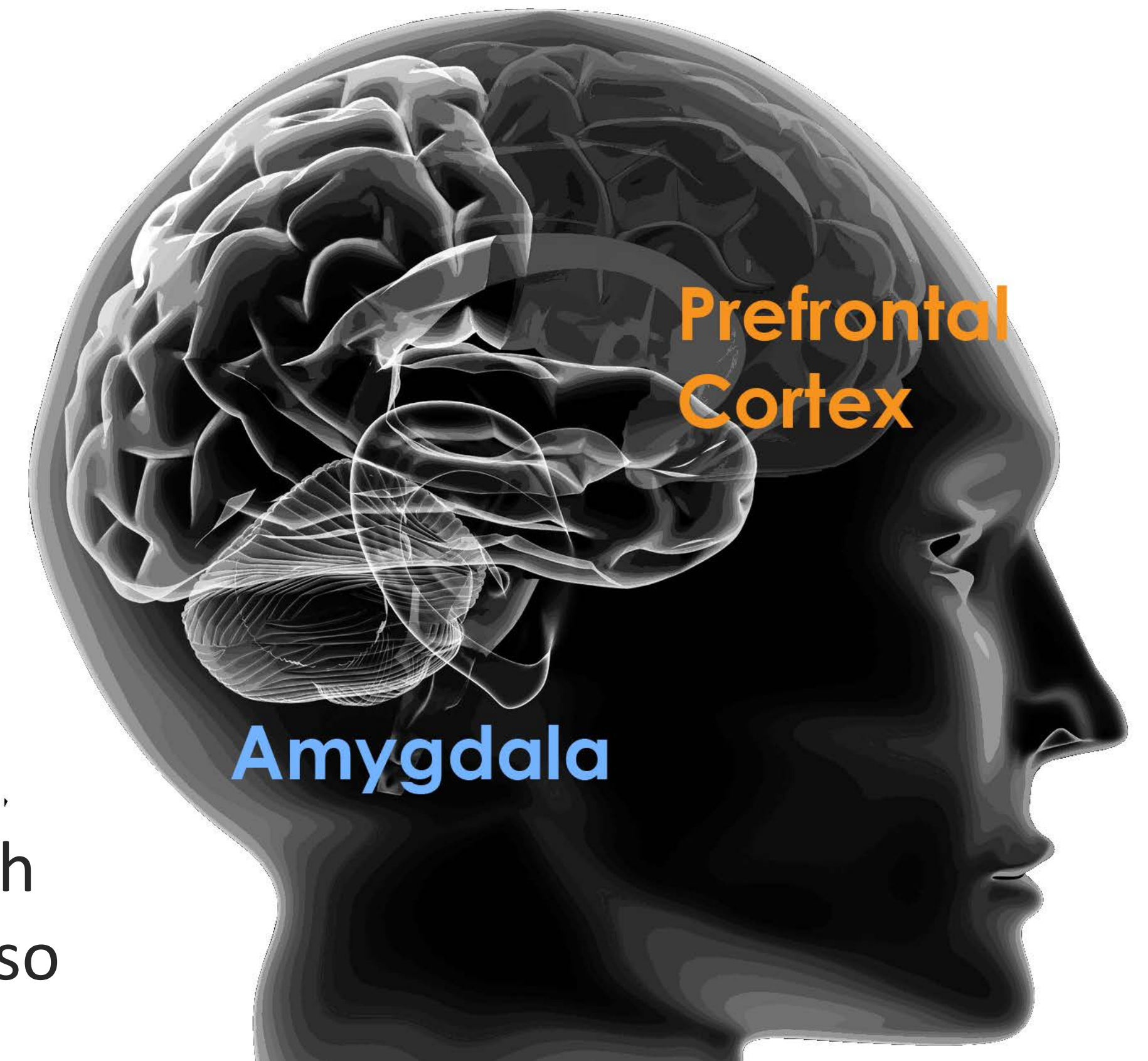


## *How the Brain NORMALLY Works*

**Frontal Lobes** are responsible for:

- ▶ Thinking
- ▶ Reasoning
- ▶ Planning Ahead
- ▶ Controlling Impulses
- ▶ Containing Emotions

When memories are made, **memory is encoded** with the help of the frontal lobes and the hippocampus, so that experiences are **in context, in sequence**.



# FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

In emergency or danger, the human brain reacts with a **fight or flight** response.

- ▶ If the danger is surmountable, we may choose to stand our ground and **fight**.
- ▶ If we can outrun or avoid the danger, we will **flee**.

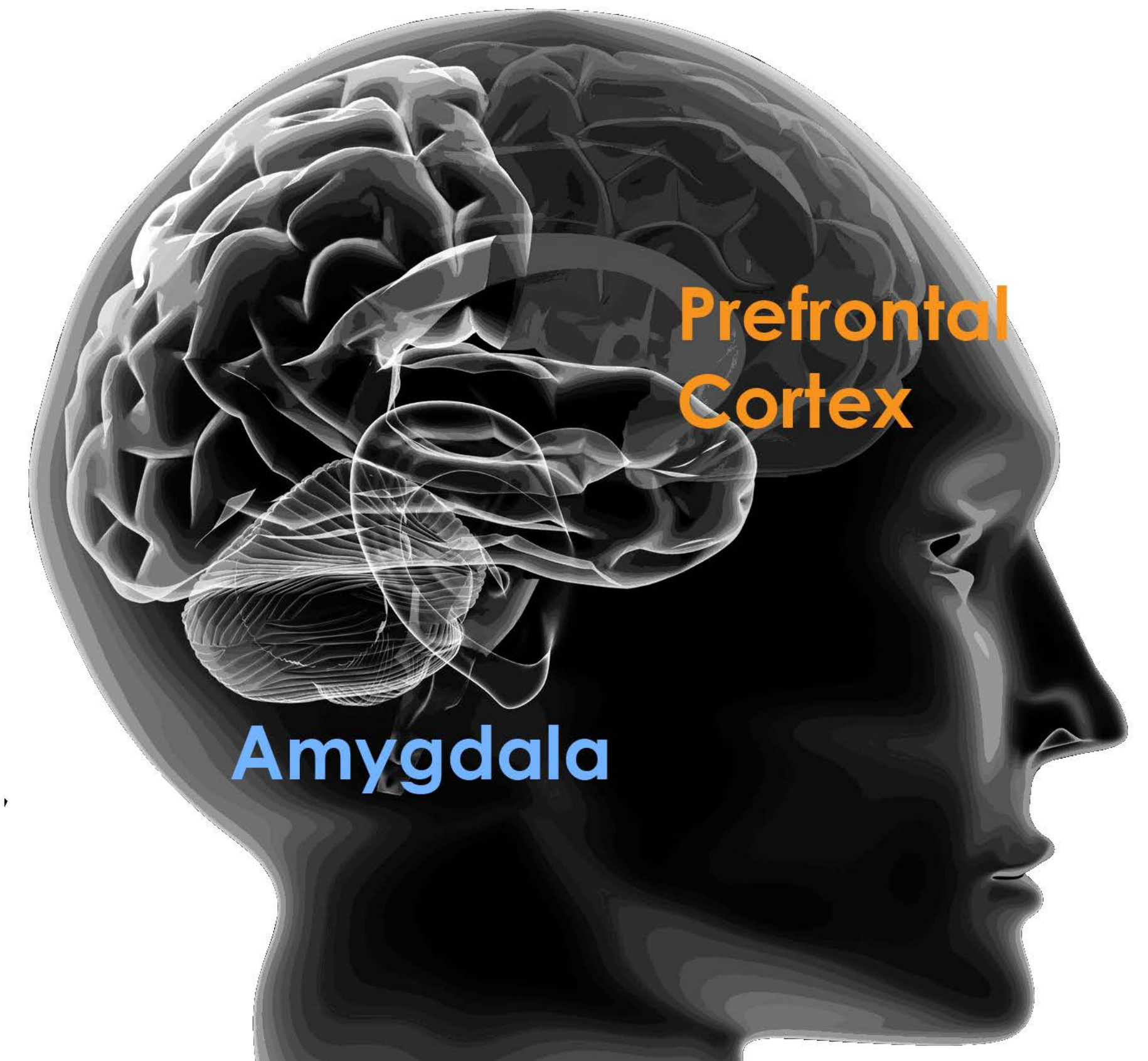


## *When the Brain Experiences Trauma*

**The Amygdala** is responsible for:

- ▶ Secreting norepinephrine and dopamine (neurotransmitters) in response to fear.
- ▶ Norepinephrine and dopamine handicap the **frontal lobes**, making them unable to encode experiences in normal context and sequence.

During trauma, **memory is encoded in intense fragments** – sights, smells, sounds – that can come back as flashbacks or nightmares afterward.



## *What is The Freeze Response?*

- ▶ In the fight or flight response we stay associated with the experience in order to fight or flee.
- ▶ In the freeze response, our brain **disassociates** us from the trauma being experienced.
- ▶ Our **cortisol** (“the stress hormone”) level shoots up, our heart races, our muscles tense and energy surges through our body.



# WHAT HAPPENS AFTER “THE FREEZE RESPONSE”?

Psychologists van der Kolk and van der Hart conducted a study in 1989 that found:

- ▶ When people don't have the chance to “let go” or “thaw out” after “freezing” in the face of danger, they can develop...
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Phobias
  - Panic Attacks
  - Obsessive-Compulsive Behaviors
  - Various Anxieties





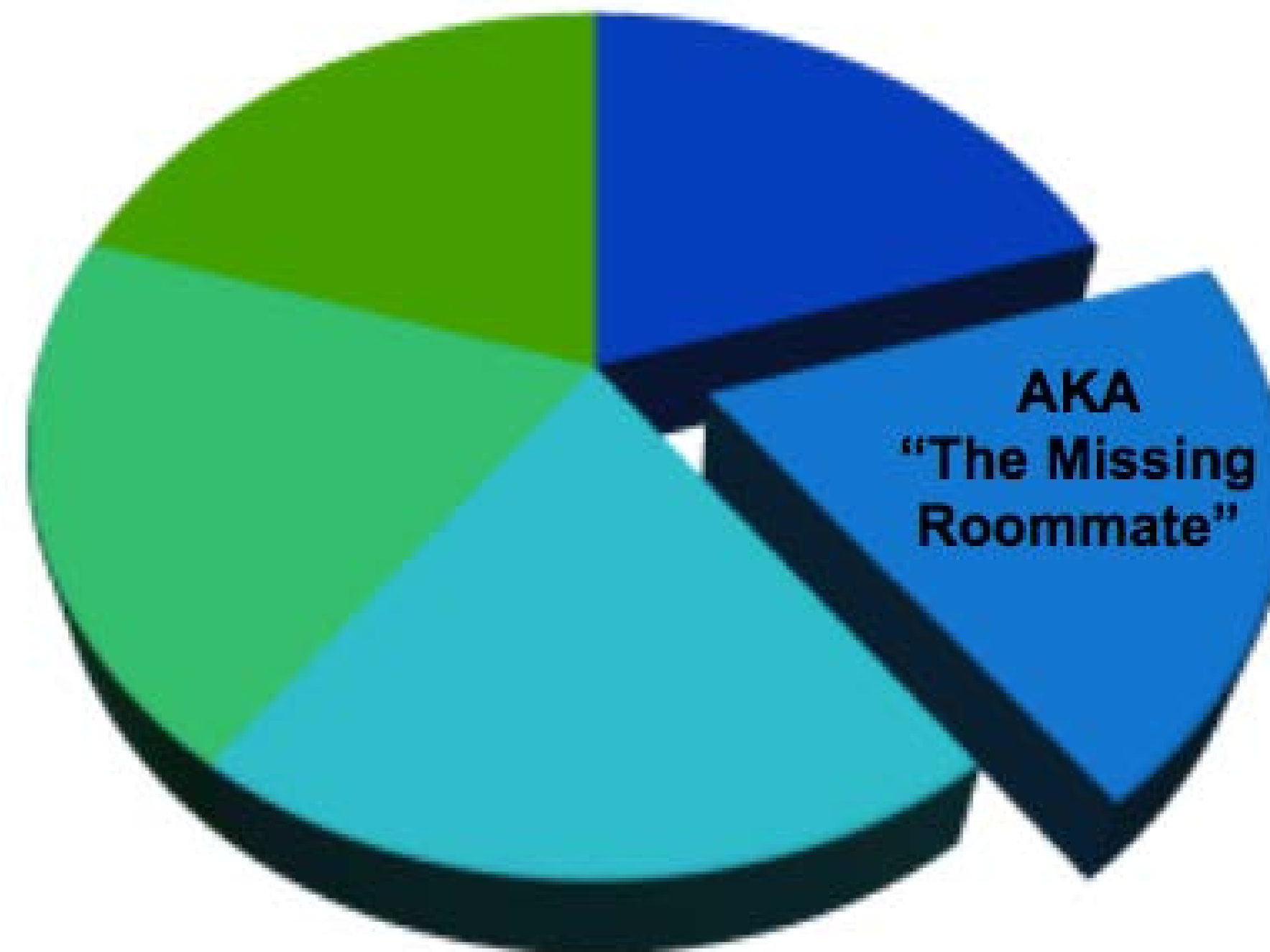
## DISCONNECTING AFTER TRAUMA

- ▶ When you go through trauma, it is normal **dissociate** yourself and deny a whole part of yourself.
- ▶ This internal disconnection can make you feel **numb** to the world around you.
- ▶ **Disconnecting** from the world for too long can lead to **PTSD**.

Reference: Bill O'Hanlon. "Resolving Trauma Without Drama." 2016.

## INHIBITION OR INTRUSION

The part of yourself you denied either becomes **inhibited (suppressed and numbed)** or it becomes **intrusive (dominant or compulsive)**.



Reference: Bill O'Hanlon. "Resolving Trauma Without Drama." 2016.

**Normal  
Reactions  
to Trauma**

**Acute Stress  
Disorder (ASD)**

**Post Traumatic  
Stress Disorder  
(PTSD)**

## EMOTIONAL AFTERSHOCKS CAN SURFACE...

- ▶ **Immediately** after a traumatic event
- ▶ **Hours after** a traumatic event
- ▶ **Days or weeks after** a traumatic event
- ▶ Occasionally, **after a long duration of time** has passed after a traumatic event

Reference: Northern Illinois Critical Stress Management Team, "Critical Incident / Traumatic Events Information" (2007).

## ***How People Think After Trauma***

- ▶ **Slower Thought Process**
- ▶ **Difficulty Making Decisions**
- ▶ **Difficulty Problem Solving**
- ▶ **Confusion**
- ▶ Disorientation (Place/Time)
- ▶ Difficulty Calculating
- ▶ **Difficulty Concentrating**
- ▶ **Memory Problem (Short/Long)**
- ▶ Difficult to Name a Familiar Item
- ▶ **Seeing an Event Over & Over**
- ▶ **Distressing Dreams**
- ▶ **Poor Attention Span (lower)**
- ▶ Blaming
- ▶ **Hyper-vigilant**
- ▶ Increase/Decrease Alertness
- ▶ Defensive Self-Review
- ▶ **Overwhelmed Normal Routine**
- ▶ Drawing Nothing but Blanks

Reference: Northern Illinois Critical Stress Management Team, "Critical Incident / Traumatic Events Information" (2007).

# *How People Feel After Trauma*


- ▶ **Anxiety**
- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Guilt
- ▶ Grief
- ▶ **Depression**
- ▶ **Sadness**
- ▶ Feeling Lost
- ▶ Feeling Abandoned
- ▶ **Feeling Isolated**
- ▶ **Worry About Others**
- ▶ Wanting to Hide
- ▶ Limited Contacts
- ▶ **Intense Anger**
- ▶ **Irritability**
- ▶ **Numb All Over**
- ▶ Denial/Uncertainty
- ▶ Apprehension
- ▶ Devoid of Feelings

Reference: Northern Illinois Critical Stress Management Team, "Critical Incident / Traumatic Events Information" (2007).

# *How People Behave After Trauma*

- ▶ Changes in Activity
- ▶ Speech Pattern Changes
- ▶ Withdraw into Oneself
- ▶ **Emotional Outbursts**
- ▶ Suspiciousness
- ▶ **Loss/Increase of Appetite**
- ▶ **Alcohol Consumption**
- ▶ **Inability to Rest/Relax**
- ▶ Antisocial Actions
- ▶ Non-specific Body Pains
- ▶ Pacing
- ▶ Erratic Movements
- ▶ Changes in Sex Life
- ▶ **Harsh with Family**
- ▶ Relational Difficulties
- ▶ Regressive Activities

Reference: Northern Illinois Critical Stress Management Team, "Critical Incident / Traumatic Events Information" (2007).



“An ASD diagnosis requires that a person experience or witness a traumatic event and have symptoms immediately after but persistent for three days to one month.”

Reference: APA, 2013.





# *Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)*

Exposure or witness to actual or threatened death,  
serious injury, or sexual violation:

- Intrusive Memories
- Negative Mood
- Dissociation (altered sense of reality)
- Avoidance
- Arousal (hypervigilance, irritable behavior, exaggerated startle response, etc.)

Reference: APA, 2013.

IS IT POST TRAUMATIC

**STRESS DISORDER?**





## *The 5 Criteria for PTSD*

- ▶ Life-threatening incident
- ▶ Intrusion
- ▶ Avoidance
- ▶ Negative thoughts and feelings
- ▶ Hyper-arousal

Reference: American Psychiatric Association. (2013) Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, (5th ed.). Washington, DC.

## *The 5 Qualifiers for PTSD*

- ▶ Duration
- ▶ Functional Significance
- ▶ Exclusion
- ▶ Dissociative Symptoms
- ▶ Delayed Expression



Reference: American Psychiatric Association. (2013) Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, (5th ed.). Washington, DC.

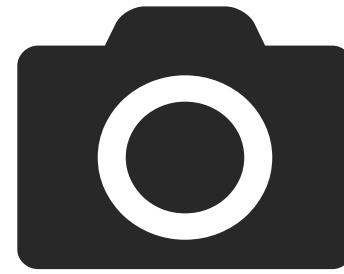
“After my trauma...I was diagnosed with PTSD, depression, and anxiety. I was losing weight, having panic attacks, and becoming extremely irritable. At my worst, sometime in the summer of 1998, I reached a point where my depression was so bad that I could barely make it out of bed, and my anxiety was so intense that it was nearly impossible to live in my own skin. The mere thought of returning to work made me nauseous. I was experiencing a high level of suicidal ideation and my alcohol intake skyrocketed.”

-Andy Perry, Peer Supporter



# THE GOAL OF TREATMENT

- ▶ **Emotional Processing:** organize memory and learn that thinking about the trauma and feeling anxious is not dangerous.
- ▶ **Habituation:** repeated remembering/reliving will make anxiety fade
- ▶ **Discrimination between remembering and being retraumatized:** realize that remembering the trauma is not the same as experiencing the trauma.
- ▶ **Increased Mastery:** enhance sense of self-control and personal competence as you stop avoiding and begin mastering your fears.
- ▶ **Differentiation:** decrease generalization of fear from the specific trauma to similar but safe situations.



# *Post-Traumatic Growth*

How trauma can contribute  
to a person's life.



## ***Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)***

Positive psychological changes made in response to adversity or trauma.

- ▶ Individuals change their thinking significantly.
- ▶ People usually recover faster from other traumatic events.
- ▶ As many as 90% of trauma survivors report having a renewed appreciation for life.



## *How People Grow*

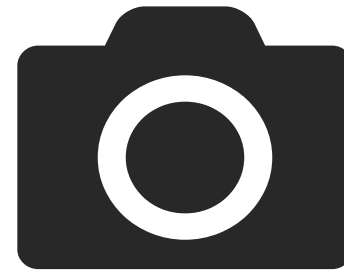
- ▶ I established a new path for my life.
- ▶ I know better that I can handle difficulties.
- ▶ I changed my priorities about what is important in life.
- ▶ New opportunities are available, which would not have been otherwise.
- ▶ I have more compassion for others.
- ▶ I discovered that I am stronger than I thought I was.
- ▶ I have a greater sense of closeness with others.

Reference: Bill O'Hanlon. "Resolving Trauma Without Drama." 2016.

# POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

- 1. Connection:** with self, others, or something beyond
- 2. Compassion:** for others and for self - forgiveness
- 3. Contribution:** letting the wound or the trauma lead to being of service and changing the world in a positive way

Reference: Bill O'Hanlon. "Resolving Trauma Without Drama." 2016.



*“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep, loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”*

*- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross*