

# Trauma and PTSD

From a psychological flexibility perspective, both trauma responses and PTSD involve understandable reactions to overwhelming events. The difference is less about the presence of distress, and more about the degree to which patterns of avoidance, fusion, and threat responding begin to narrow a person's life.

This table outlines key differences and overlaps between trauma as an emotional response and PTSD as a diagnosable condition. It can serve as a useful guide for practitioners when working with clients.

Aspect	TRAUMA	PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)
<b>Definition</b>	Trauma refers to an emotional response to a distressing or disturbing event.	PTSD is a mental health condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing trauma.
<b>Symptoms</b>	Shock, denial, sadness, anger, confusion, or fear in the aftermath of an event.	Intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, avoidance, and emotional numbing.
<b>Duration</b>	Symptoms are often short-term and may resolve with time.	Symptoms persist for more than a month and significantly impact daily functioning.
<b>Impact on daily life</b>	May temporarily affect relationships, work, or general well-being.	Often causes long-term disruptions in relationships, work, and overall quality of life.
<b>Causes</b>	Any distressing experience such as an accident, loss, disaster, or violence.	Exposure to life-threatening events, combat, assault, or severe trauma.
<b>Diagnosis</b>	Not a clinical diagnosis, but rather a response to an event.	Diagnosed by a mental health professional based on specific criteria in the DSM-5.
<b>Treatment</b>	Supportive care, coping strategies, and time.	Often requires psychotherapy (like trauma-focused CBT or ACT) and, in some cases, medication.
<b>Focus in therapy</b>	Supporting willingness to experience difficult thoughts and feelings related to the event, while strengthening valued action.	Helping clients respond more flexibly to intrusive experiences, step out of rigid avoidance patterns, and reconnect with valued areas of life.