

How Does Trauma Impact Intimacy?

The most common ways that trauma can impact intimacy is in the following ways:

- Disconnection
- Decrease in relationship satisfaction
- Impaired expression of emotions
- Impaired engagement during sexual activity, intimacy and communication
- Difficulties connecting
- Withholding – since a critical piece of trauma is helplessness, sometimes intimacy may be the only area where an individual can have some control, so they may withhold or disconnect, to establish some sense of agency, albeit subconsciously

These symptoms get significantly worse when the trauma has to do with intimate betrayal, because of the following reasons:

- It makes you question your place in the other party's world
- It makes you question your sex appeal and emotional worth
- It can pose challenges with disrobing
- It can make getting close really challenging, out of fear of letting the other person in (and possibly getting hurt again)
- It can cause anger, rage, and a need to punish
- It can lead to trust issues; and intimacy without trust is like trying to dance without music – you can go through the motions without feeling it

Bottom line, especially in cases of intimate trauma, a person can't even begin to heal, until they feel the other party truly gets the pain they caused. And without healing, intimacy is usually the first thing to go. That said, some people will still try to go through the motions, to hold onto a partner, out of a sense of obligation, or to avoid fighting, and then they tend

to feel resentful and possibly ill. Some have reported that they feel like they're being raped, so they keep getting retraumatized, but their partner may not even have a clue.

Other small t traumas, such as a loss of a loved one, a loss of a job or a home, etc. can cause one to slip into depression, dissociation, or constantly being on guard, all of which make intimacy very challenging. Furthermore, those states put one in a constant fight or flight mode, with a steady stream of the stress hormone cortisol, coursing through their veins. That in turn constricts the blood vessels in the nether zones and causes testosterone to plummet, both of which impact intimacy.

In general, we tend to put intimacy on the back burner, so when we're feeling unsafe or unhealthy, it gets practically pushed away altogether. But intimacy is important to connection, so it's important to do the work, to heal from the trauma, as well as rebuild intimacy.