

How does trauma affect our systems?

Trauma shocks and changes all systems. These include:

- Cognitive: The trauma affects the ability to process thoughts and make good judgments
- Emotional: Looping with emotions of [shame](#), [guilt](#), [fear](#), [anger](#), and pain. We are vulnerable to mental health issues. Depression, anxiety, mood altering substances. In the mental health field, we are experiencing a significant uptick in the need for mental health services, and we are braced for a mental health pandemic.
- Physical: It affects muscles, joints, digestion and metabolism, temperature, sleep, immune system, etc.
- Spiritual: The trauma affects our worldview, the lenses with which we see reality (typically so, we see it as unsafe), our understanding and meaning of life, society, and the world
- Social: The trauma affects relationships with spouses, family, friends, colleagues, and strangers (because it affects so many so deeply, it affects structures of societies).

Childhood: The hearts of children are soft. When we talk about childhood trauma, we talk about adverse childhood experiences (or what we call ACEs). Many of us have one or more ACEs in our history: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, parental drug or alcohol abuse, frequent moves, bullying, racially based discrimination, almost anything that made us different and, therefore, subject to feeling that we did not belong.

Adverse childhood experiences may make some of us strong or help us to develop resilience, but the body keeps score and the more ACEs we have as children the more likely we are to experience trauma related physical effects as we age.

Individual: In adulthood trauma looks like job loss or some other significant economic set back, relationship loss either through an emotional separation or death, an acutely stressful job situation, domestic violence, physical assault including sexual assault, loss of a permanent home, caring for someone with a serious chronic illness, living with someone who is abusing alcohol or drugs, is a chronic gambler, is addicted to pornography, or is challenged by some other addiction—and many other ways that trauma happens in our adult world.

Collective: In the midst of a pandemic that has killed hundreds of thousands, we probably don't need a better example of what collective trauma looks like. And, of course, in the aftermath of the assault on the Capital, many have experienced a shared experience of trauma. In our churches we can experience collective trauma if there is extreme pastoral misconduct—either financial or sexual. Or the death of a pastor. Or there is a significant problem with our building like a fire or a roof collapse. Or even when there are events that we choose such as when a church closes permanently, or merges with another church.

Collective trauma is when we experience as a group a feeling that our life, as we have known it, is threatened or changed in ways we do not desire.

Micro-aggressions: Micro-aggressions are those small but cumulative moments when we know we have been emotionally attacked. People of color know about micro-aggressions. It's when you sit down and someone gets up and moves away from you, or flinches if you accidentally touch them. People who fit somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum can tell you about sneers and bad jokes they have had to tolerate. Women can tell you about mansplaining. Gentle men and boys can tell you about derision if they cry in public. People with physical challenges can tell you about all the ways the non-physically challenged world tells them they are irritants. People with mental health challenges can tell you what it feels like when we joke about feeling "crazy." Micro-aggressions are traumatic because of their cumulative effect in our lives and our bodies.