

LIVING WITH THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

By Terri Phillips, MFT

We live in a world where traumatic events happen on a daily basis. Watching the evening news or reading the daily newspaper reminds us how frequently they occur in life. These traumatic events can be world events or can be more personal traumatic events such as an illness or abuse in a family. Everyone responds differently when faced with trauma.

There are some people who are so affected by the trauma that they continue to re-experience this trauma and it begins to linger impacting their daily functioning. This could possibly indicate what professionals have named Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. Wikipedia defines PTSD as “A severe anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma”.

PTSD can happen to those who have experienced military combat, some type of violent crime or assault, auto accidents, severe injuries, life threatening illnesses, child abuse, and sexual abuse or observing any of these types of traumatic events. The key to diagnosing this disorder is that the person continues to experience this trauma in some way even after the event is over. Some may have nightmares or flashbacks while others may just continue to experience the feelings of the trauma over and over again. These symptoms interrupt their functioning by interfering with sleep, decreasing their involvement in activities that trigger these thoughts, difficulty concentrating, or even angry outbursts.

Statistics from Wed MD state that 3.6 % of adult Americans have PTSD or 5.2 million people during the course of a year. This form of continued trauma creates stress in the affected person’s brain as they relive these experiences. Neurofeedback is one method to help calm these brain traumas, allow sleep and improve the level of functioning. J. Robbins (2000) in his book “A Symphony in the Brain” relates that it is estimated that nearly half a million Vietnam Veterans are still affected by this illness.

Neurofeedback is a non-invasive form of treatment in which a professional, after a thorough assessment, places sensors on areas of the scalp to assist the person in conditioning their own brain with the aid of a computer. The client exercises or trains their brain to operate in a calm, alert and focused manner during the course of treatment. J. Demos (2005) in “Getting Started with Neurofeedback” asserts that neurofeedback can allow the client to process the trauma to work toward resolving it. Mr. Demos states that the “symptoms directly related to PTSD include anxiety, irrational fears, sudden anger, depression, emotional numbness, substance abuse, inability to experience simple pleasures, detachment, foggy thinking or confusion, exaggerated startle response, helplessness and nightmares.” (pp. 186-187)

The brain remembers the trauma that is experienced and continues to relive it in a variety of ways. It is important for anyone who believes they may have PTSD to get treatment as soon as possible after the event. The goal of any treatment plan should be to reduce the symptoms and improve the coping skills. A medical professional or mental health professional is qualified to make a diagnosis of PTSD and it is crucial to take that first step to get help if you believe that PTSD is interfering with your life or the life of a friend or family member. The National Center for PTSD – www.ptsd.va.gov/ can provide you with the resources. www.eeginfo.com can provide you with a list of experienced neurofeedback providers. Get help today!!

Terri Phillips is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in Neurofeedback located in Temecula. Call 909-730-0410 or visit www.terriphillipsmft.com for more information.