

Properties Of Trauma Memories

Memories of traumatic experiences often have special properties that make them different from ordinary memories.



Involuntary

Trauma memories often come to your mind against your will, even when you try *not* to think about what happened. You might find that they are triggered automatically by things around you which remind you of the trauma.



Nowness

When you have an unwanted memory of your trauma, it can feel as though the events are happening *right now in the present moment*. Some trauma memories are so strong that you might temporarily lose touch with where you are. Psychologists call this 'nowness'.



Sensory

Trauma memories are powerful and can be experienced in any of your senses. You might see, hear, smell, or taste the events happening again. You might experience feelings in your body that you felt at the time. You may even re-experience pain that you felt during the trauma.



Fragmented

Ordinary memories usually have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In contrast, trauma memories are sometimes fragmented. Instead of remembering the whole story, it is common to have unwanted memories of the worst parts.



Vivid & unchanging

Ordinary memories tend to fade with time – you might remember an overview of what happened, but you forget the details. Many people who have experienced trauma find that their memories don't fade or change, even after many years.



During day or night

Trauma memories can be experienced as unwanted 'flashbacks' during the day, or as nightmares while you sleep.



Emotional

When your trauma memories are triggered, you might feel the same strong emotions that you felt at the time of the trauma, such as fear, terror, shame, or disgust. Re-experiencing your trauma memories can also trigger strong new emotional responses.