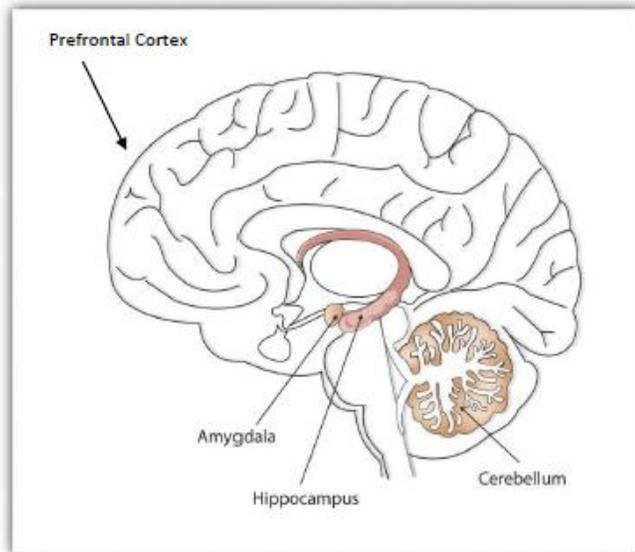


### Common Reactions to Stress

Fear and Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This emotion is normal and it's designed to keep us safe.</li> <li>• <i>Triggers</i> or cues that can cause anxiety may include places, times of day, certain smells or noises, or any situation that reminds you of the trauma.</li> </ul>
Re-Experiencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constant exposure to stressful situations in daily life can lead to: nightmares, unwanted thoughts or images, flashbacks, or vivid images, as if the trauma is reoccurring.</li> <li>• These symptoms occur because traumatic experiences can be difficult to process and fit into our normal day-to-day understanding.</li> <li>• Replaying these memories seems to be an attempt to integrate the experience and make more sense of what happened.</li> </ul>
Increased Arousal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous arousal can lead to impatience and irritability, especially if you're not getting enough sleep.</li> <li>• You may startle easy, feel jumpy, jittery, and shaky, or have trouble concentrating or sleeping.</li> </ul>
Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A coping mechanism to manage trauma related pain.</li> <li>• This includes: avoiding situations that remind us of the traumatic event such as events, time of day, or locations.</li> <li>• You may push away painful thoughts and feelings, which can lead to a state of emotional numbness.</li> <li>• Memories of the trauma can also be forgotten.</li> </ul>
Angry, irritable, and easily annoyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can be uncomfortable and confusing, and may lead to isolation from support networks.</li> <li>• Anger can also arise from feeling that the world is not fair or just.</li> </ul>
Guilt and shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a common reaction to stress because many people blame themselves for things they cannot control.</li> <li>• A misunderstanding of our limbic system (alarm system) can also influence the prevalence of these feelings.</li> </ul>
Depression, Grief and Negative Self-Image and Views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can include feelings of sadness, despair, worthlessness, and distorted view of yourself and the world.</li> <li>• You may lose interest in people and activities you used to enjoy.</li> <li>• It makes it difficult to plan for the future.</li> <li>• These feelings can lead to thoughts of self-harm and/or suicidal ideation.</li> <li>• The trauma may convince you that the world is dangerous.</li> </ul>
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with others can become tense or strained due to a lack of understanding from others, or lack of time to socialize.</li> <li>• You may find your trust of others decreases because of your constant state of arousal.</li> </ul>
Self-destructive Coping Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can take on many forms for example: eating disorders, any addiction, self-harming behaviours.</li> <li>• The use of alcohol and/or other drugs is a common coping strategy for dealing with traumatic experiences.</li> <li>• Unhealthy coping mechanisms can be perceived as a short-term solution, and could lead to negative consequences long-term.</li> </ul>

-Adapted from Foa, Hembree, Riggs, Rauch, & Franklin (2009).

## PTSD and the Brain



The two brain structures that play an important role in PTSD are the amygdala and the hippocampus. The *amygdala* is the body's alarm system (the fight or flight response). When the brain perceives a threat, the amygdala becomes active and sends messages to the rest of the body to prepare for danger. The amygdala also processes emotional memories. The *hippocampus* is responsible for processing information about your life and experiences by storing it away in long term memory for later use. Under normal circumstances, these regions communicate with one another and with the rest of the brain in a smooth fashion. However, **traumatic stress disrupts the communication between these different areas**. The logical, rational parts of your brain cannot get the message through to the amygdala that the danger is

over and it's okay to relax. The hippocampus cannot take the emotional information processed by the amygdala and store it away as a long term memory. Therefore the traumatic memories stay with you all the time and you continue to feel as if you are in constant danger.

