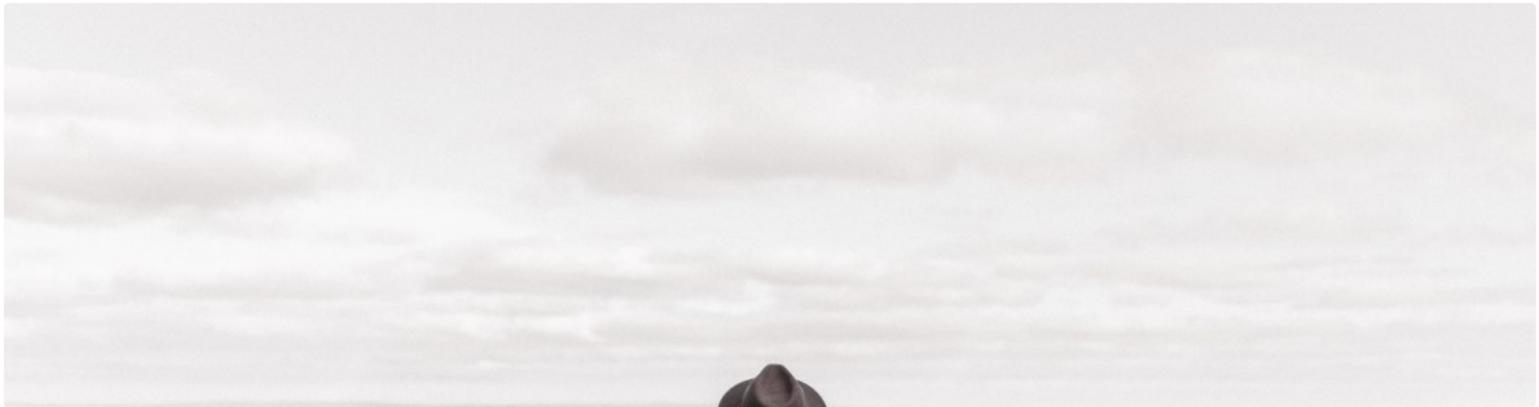


Trauma and Crystal Methamphetamine Use



The word trauma literally means wound. Physical traumas are injuries to the body caused by physical contact, like bruises and broken bones. **Psychological traumas** are injuries to psychological and emotional wellbeing caused by events that threaten our safety or bodily integrity, or the safety or bodily integrity of someone else such as our loved ones. This page focuses on this second kind of trauma and how it relates to crystal methamphetamine ('ice') use.

What is a traumatic event?

Traumatic events differ for different people. What one person experiences as traumatic, another may not. What's important is a person's *perception* or *subjective experience* of an event. If an event is perceived as a threat to safety or bodily integrity, then it has the potential to be traumatic.

Some examples of events that can be experienced as traumatic are shown below. Remember though, not everyone who experiences these events will necessarily experience them as traumatic, and there are many other events not on this list that have the potential to be experienced as traumatic.

Childhood abuse



Physical abuse



Sexual abuse



Emotional abuse



Physical & emotional abuse

Childhood household instability



Caregiver mental health difficulties



Caregiver substance abuse



Domestic abuse



Caregiver criminal involvement

Adult trauma



Physical, psychological, emotional, sexual abuse in relationships



Accidents



Natural disasters

Traumatic events can be experienced on a **single occasion, repeatedly**, or for a **prolonged period**. For example, a person could experience trauma in response to a once in a lifetime natural disaster or following repeated sexual abuse.

Traumatic events can also be **directly** or **indirectly** experienced. For example, a person could experience trauma after being in a car accident or hearing about a car accident their loved one was involved in.

For more information on what trauma is, and its effects on the brain, watch Dovetail's video [Trauma and the Brain](#) here.

What are signs of trauma?

Traumatic events can be life changing. This is because they can dramatically change how we think, feel, and behave. Each person is different and responds to traumatic events in their own way. However, there are particular types of reactions that are common. These are shown below:



Physical

- Feeling on edge
- Being easily startled
- Difficulty sleeping

- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased heart rate, sweating or feeling shaky when reminded of the trauma



Psychological

- Negative changes to how the person views themselves, others, and the world (e.g., I am weak; Others can't be trusted)
- Re-experiencing the traumatic event as if it were happening again, in memories, nightmares, or flashbacks
- Being unable to recall key parts of the event
- Having more negative thoughts
- Depersonalization, i.e., feeling detached from and observing oneself from the outside
- Derealization, i.e., feeling unreal or distorted
- Thoughts of self-harm or harming others





Emotional

- Fear or **anxiety**
- Depression, hopelessness
- Mood swings
- Anger, aggression, or **irritability**
- Shame or guilt
- Feeling distant or isolated from others
- Experiencing less positive feelings or emotions





Behavioural

- Avoiding people, places, or activities associated with the event
- Always being on the lookout for danger
- Decreased interest in day-to-day activities
- Low sex drive
- Risky or destructive behaviour





Life impacts

- Problems in relationships with partners, family, and friends
- Finding it difficult to work and do activities you previously enjoyed

If you're worried about signs of trauma in yourself or someone you know, read the *Where to get support* section at the end of this factsheet.

How common is trauma?

Most Australians will experience at least one potentially traumatic event in their lifetime. Not everyone will respond in the same way though. While many won't develop trauma symptoms at all, others will have reactions that persist or get worse over time. For some, trauma symptoms may be delayed, not showing up until much later in life.

How common is trauma in people who have difficulties with crystal methamphetamine use?

People who experience difficulties with alcohol and other drug use are more likely to have experienced trauma than others. This is particularly true for people who use substances like crystal **methamphetamine** as opposed to substances like alcohol and cannabis.

There are several possible reasons why trauma is more common in people who have difficulties with alcohol and other drugs.

- People who have experienced trauma may use alcohol and other drugs to manage their trauma symptoms.
- The effects of using alcohol and other drugs may put people at a greater risk of experiencing traumatic events.
- The same psychological, environmental, and biological factors that place people at a higher risk of having difficulties with alcohol and other drug use may also place people at a higher risk of experiencing trauma.

Regardless of how trauma and substance use problems initially develop, they often work to maintain one another over time. Recovery often involves addressing both the impacts of trauma and substance use.

Where to get support

If you're worried about signs of trauma in yourself or someone you know, or you're worried about your crystal **methamphetamine** use or a loved one who may be using crystal **methamphetamine**, speak to **your GP**. They can confidentially discuss your concerns with you and refer you on to other services if you need additional support.

If you need **emergency support**, please call **Lifeline (13 11 14)** which is a 24-hour crisis helpline or **dial '000'** for the police or an ambulance.

If you require support for sexual assault, family or domestic violence, call **1800 RESPECT**.

You can also visit **Phoenix Australia** (phoenixaustralia.org) for more information on trauma and mental health or **The Blue Knot Foundation** (blueknot.org.au) for support for adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse.

If you are seeking help for trauma and drug use, research indicates it may be beneficial to work on both your trauma symptoms and drug use at the same time. If you can't find a health professional who can help you do this, you can seek out the services of both a mental health professional and alcohol and other drug professional.

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