*Dealing with the Trauma*

Trauma is a person’s emotional response to a distressing experience. Few people can go through life without encountering some kind of trauma. Traumatic events can create short and long-term health issues. Trauma can trigger serious physical health complications like a heart attack or a stroke. It can also affect your emotional and or mental well-being memory and even your ability to think clearly. Long term effects of trauma can be even more damaging. Trauma and stress affect your body’s immune system which can lead to a variety of illnesses that can range from colds and flu symptoms to cancer. When I was training for my foster license, I learned about a study conducted by Kaiser Permanente that measured the long-term effects of trauma on children in foster care. The study provided predictable results. Children that dealt with trauma at a young age were more likely to perform poorly in school, have sleeping disorders and behavioral problems. As they grew into adulthood, they were significantly more likely to get arrested, develop drug and alcohol addictions and commit suicide. An unexpected finding was that children who experience trauma at a young age and managed to make it to adulthood were also more likely to develop cancer, gastrointestinal issues, even liver and kidney problems, by a ratio of 3-1. This comprehensive study demonstrated that trauma can have very serious long term mental, emotional and even physical affects that can last throughout an entire lifetime.

So, what does that have to do with being a single parent or being divorced with children? Many single parents have mastered the art of doing it alone. For others it is a constant, stressful struggle. Some people have amicable divorces, some get divorced later in life, others really do grow apart and have no difficulties leaving their marriage. For most of us, divorce is traumatic, as is being a single parent. You may notice a lapse in memory or judgement. Weight gain and poor eating habits are common among single parents. There *is* such a thing as emotional eating. You might be aware of the constant and daily stress in your life manifesting itself in a variety of ways. All of these issues and events are signs of trauma. If you notice any of these things, it’s important to seek professional help to determine how traumatic your divorce may have been. You need to determine the impact, recognize the effects, and create a path to mental well-being. In this situation, no one should ever hesitate to see a professional therapist during a separation, divorce or managing your life completely on your own as a single parent.

Recognizing signs of trauma in adults can be complex, as different individuals may exhibit symptoms in varying degrees. Trauma affects people differently and not everyone will display the same signs or exhibit them the same way. However, below are some commons symptoms and warning signs.

1. *Lapse in memory or using poor judgement*: This is not about losing your keys or forgetting what you had for breakfast. It would be something more serious like not remembering if you had a meeting with one of your kids’ teachers a few days prior or someone calling to thank you for a birthday gift and not remembering you sent one. I would use the same criteria for poor judgement. We all are guilty of doing absent-minded things. I once, after getting gas, drove away with the hose still in my gas tank. On another occasion, I was walking out of the supermarket with a shopping cart full of groceries, received a phone call, got in my car so I could hear the person better, and drove away without the groceries. Those episodes represent something much more serious than being careless or distracted.
2. *Emotional Distress*: Adults experiencing trauma may exhibit intense and persistent emotions such as sadness, fear, anger or irritability. They may also have frequent mood swings and find it difficult to regulate their emotions.
3. *Avoidance Behavior:* Trauma survivors often try to avoid situations, places, people that remind them of a past traumatic event. They may isolate themselves socially, withdraw from activities they once enjoyed or become emotionally detached.
4. *Intrusive Thoughts:* Adults with trauma may experience intrusive memories, flashbacks, or nightmares related to the traumatic event. These distressing recollections can be triggered by various stimuli and may cause the person to re-experience the trauma as if it were happening again. This is very common for people that have been in an abusive relationship.
5. *Hypervigilance or Startled Response:* Trauma can heighten a person's alertness to potential threats, leading to hypervigilance. They may constantly feel on edge, easily startled, and have difficulty relaxing or sleeping.
6. *Physical Symptoms:* Trauma can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems, chronic pain, fatigue, or changes in appetite or sleep patterns.
7. *Relationships:* Trauma can impact an individual's ability to trust and connect with others. They may struggle with intimacy, have difficulty forming or maintaining relationships, or exhibit patterns of avoidance or aggression.
8. *Substance abuse and Self-destructive behavior:* Some trauma survivors turn to substances like drugs or alcohol as a way to cope with their emotional pain. They may also engage in self-harming behaviors or have thoughts of suicide.
9. *Negative self-perception:* Adults affected by trauma often experience low self-esteem, guilt, shame, or feelings of worthlessness. They may blame themselves for the traumatic event or struggle with a distorted self-image.

These signs might seem a little extreme for divorced or single parents with kids. Unfortunately, I have seen these signs exhibited in too many of the single parents I know, including myself. As I mentioned above, if you are experiencing any of these behaviors, do not hesitate to see a professional therapist. If you would like to watch a very informative video on trauma, this is the one of the best videos I have ever seen on trauma. It’s better than reading a book. [(64) How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime | Nadine Burke Harris - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovIJ3dsNk).