

# What is Trauma?

Trauma is a powerful emotional response to a distressing event, such as war, an accident, the unexpected loss of a loved one, or abuse. Trauma can continue to cause both emotional and physical symptoms for years after the event has concluded.

## Acute vs. Complex Trauma

**Acute trauma** results from a single, sudden, and often unexpected event that is emotionally overwhelming or life-threatening.

*Example:* A person involved in a serious car accident might experience acute trauma. The event is isolated in time but can leave lasting psychological effects like anxiety, flashbacks, or hypervigilance.

**Complex trauma** arises from repeated, prolonged exposure to traumatic events, often occurring during early life and within interpersonal relationships (e.g., abuse, neglect).

*Example:* A child who experiences chronic physical and emotional abuse over several years may develop complex trauma. This can affect their emotional regulation, sense of self, and relationships throughout their life.

## Common Symptoms of Trauma

avoidance of trauma reminders, including memories	exaggerated startle response
irritability, anger, and other negative emotions	flashbacks to the traumatic event
distressing dreams and other sleep problems	self-blame regarding the traumatic event