

## Recognizing the Impact of Collective Trauma

### Worksheet

In life, we may find ourselves impacted by collective trauma. Collective trauma refers to traumatic situations and the effects that it has on a group of people, community, or society. Collective trauma may be caused human-caused or natural disasters and can include situations like hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, tsunamis, mass shootings, terrorism, war, genocide, systematic oppression, historical oppression, pandemics, displacement, or famine and severe poverty (Saul, 2014). It is important to note that a group, community, or society may experience collective trauma in response to a one-time incident, but that it may also be a response to cumulative adverse experiences (such as systematic racism and oppression).

The hope of this worksheet is to provide you with a tool to better understand how collective trauma may be impacting your well-being. As we gain an increased understanding of where we are and how collective trauma may be impacting us, we then may find ourselves more equipped to cope with the challenges we are facing and be able to seek out any resources we may need.

In this worksheet, you will work through four areas to help you identify where a collective trauma response may be surfacing in your life. These areas include 1) physiological well-being, 2) psychological and emotional well-being, 3) relational well-being, and 4) spiritual well-being. After going through these areas, you will also find space to reflect on what insights you have gained and what action steps you would like to take in response to your new insights.

#### References and Additional Resources to Look Into

Render Turmaud, D. (2020). What is collective trauma? Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifting-the-veil-trauma/202005/what-is-collective-trauma>

Saul, J. (2014). Collective trauma, collective healing: Promoting resilience in the aftermath of disaster. New York, NY: Routledge.

## Physiological Impact

Our bodies are magnificent and often provide us with valuable information about how we are doing. When we endure stress, especially high levels of stress (like experienced in response to trauma), a stress response may surface in the body. This portion of the worksheet allows you to take some time to consider how collective trauma consequences may be surfacing in your body.

Before filling out this portion of the worksheet ask yourself the following question: In response to the situation that elicited collective trauma, or the ongoing situation that may be leading to collective trauma in myself, the group I identify with, my community, or my society, have I noticed any physiological changes in my body or health? If so, what are they? Brainstorm and jot any changes that you have noticed in the space below:

Lately, I have been feeling really tired and sluggish. I can't seem to stop wanting to sleep!

I've noticed that I have been having more headaches than usual.

After brainstorming, utilize the section below to help you consider in what ways collective trauma may be impacting you.

## Have you noticed any.....

### Changes in your sleep?

Yes! I want to sleep all of the time. I sleep about 12 hours a night and still need naps during the day. That isn't like me.

### Changes in your appetite?

Now that I think about it, I haven't really been needing to eat as much as usual. I just don't feel hungry.

### Changes in your sex drive?

Maybe? I haven't been wanting to have sex with my partner as much as I used to.

### Changes in your energy levels?

Yes! The fatigue is real.

### Changes in your body's typical functioning e.g. body aches, stomach aches, headaches, etc.)?

Mainly just headaches.

### Changes in your ability to fight off illness?

No. Not that I have realized.

Other physiological or health changes (e.g. sweating, heart palpitations, difficulties breathing, etc.)?

Sometimes I notice my chest feels tight.

## Psychological Impact

Trauma and collective trauma situations may impact the brain and our ability to cope. It is important to recognize that in response to traumatic situations, it is not uncommon for us to struggle with a number of psychological or emotional consequences. This portion of the worksheet allows you to take some time to consider how collective trauma consequences may be impacting your psychological and emotional well-being.

Before filling out this portion of the worksheet ask yourself the following question: In response to the situation that elicited collective trauma, or the ongoing situation that may be leading to collective trauma in myself, the group I identify with, my community, or my society, have I noticed any psychological or emotional changes? If so, what are they? Brainstorm and jot any changes that you have noticed in the space below:

*I've been feeling really sad and down lately...I am experiencing these weird fluctuations between feeling depressed about everything that is happening and anxious about what could happen next. I'm feeling completely drained by all of this.*

After brainstorming, utilize the section below to help you consider in what ways collective trauma may be impacting you.

## Have you noticed any.....

Changes in your stress levels?

If so, how? What have you noticed?

Yes, I definitely feel more stressed than usual.

Changes in your emotions?

If so, how? What have you noticed?

I've noticed feeling sadder and more anxious than I usually am.

Changes in your behaviors or ability to cope?

If so, how? What have you noticed?

Yes. I have noticed that almost anything stressful is too much for me to handle and I start crying or worrying about what is happening/could happen, etc.

Circle any of the potential psychological or emotional impacts below that you relate to in your experience of collective trauma:

Anxiety

Decreased  
Motivation

Feeling in a  
“fog”

Feeling  
Disconnected

Feeling  
Hypervigilant

Spacing Out

Fear

Feelings of  
Worthlessness

Addictive  
Behaviors

Nightmares

Impulsivity

Grief

Depression

Confusion

Feelings of  
Shock

Forgetfulness/  
Difficulties  
Remembering

Altered  
Worldview of  
Self/Others

PTSD/Traumatic  
Stress Symptoms

Loneliness

Difficulties with  
Substance Abuse

After going through this worksheet thus far, what insights have you gained about yourself and how collective trauma may be impacting you?

Honestly, I hadn't realized how much this had been impacting me! I kept wondering why I was in this funk, and I've been hard on myself for it.

Are you recognizing any areas where you may need extra support in this time? If so, what?

Yes, I have been feeling so so down lately. I need some help in feeling less down and finding motivation in my life again to do things.

What are some things that you can do to meet yourself where you are with kindness and support?

This is so helpful for me...to see that I am not crazy. I realize now that I am not the only one who could struggle with all of this! That really helps me feel better about myself. Right now, I want to focus on being kinder to myself when I am not doing as well as I would like to.

## Relational Impact

Trauma and collective trauma may not only impact us on an intrapersonal level but may also impact us interpersonally. We may find our ability to relate to others or interact with others altered. This portion of the worksheet allows you to take some time to consider how collective trauma consequences may be impacting your relationships.

Before filling out this portion of the worksheet ask yourself the following question: In response to the situation that elicited collective trauma, or the ongoing situation that may be leading to collective trauma in myself, the group I identify with, my community, or my society, have I noticed any changes in my relationships? What about your ability to relate to others? If so, what are they? Brainstorm and jot any changes that you have noticed in the space below:

Hmmm...I don't know? I have noticed that my partner and I have been fighting more than usual. I have also noticed that I am easily frustrated with my kids.



Below are some of the ways that a collective trauma response may surface in our ability to relate with others.  
Circle any that you relate to:

Reduced sense of Safety and  
Openness with Others

Reduced Social Involvement  
or Isolation

Difficulties in Trusting  
Others

Increased Conflicts

Difficulties with Aggression  
or Violence

Difficulties in Parenting

Difficulties in  
Communicating with Others

Difficulties in Feeling Able  
to Connect to Others

Increased Concerns about  
Loved Ones' Safety and  
Placing a lot of Energy in  
Protecting Them

Or have you noticed any other changes in your relationships?

## Spiritual Impact

The impact of collective trauma may surface in many areas of our lives, including our faith or spirituality. Regardless of our beliefs, religion, or spirituality, we may find our beliefs altered or changed in response to collective trauma (in positive or negative ways). This portion of the worksheet allows you to take some time to consider how collective trauma consequences may be impacting your spirituality.

Before filling out this portion of the worksheet ask yourself the following question: In response to the situation that elicited collective trauma, or the ongoing situation that may be leading to collective trauma in myself, the group I identify with, my community, or my society, have I noticed any changes in my spiritual beliefs/faith? If so, what are they? Brainstorm and jot any changes that you have noticed in the space below:

Hmm...I don't know this one.

After brainstorming, utilize the section below to help you consider in what ways collective trauma may be impacting you.

## Have you noticed any.....

Changes in your beliefs?

I have started to wonder  
if there is a God.

Changes in the way you interact  
with your spirituality/religion/deity?

I've honestly been pretty angry  
at God for this. I have noticed  
that I keep asking, "God why  
are you letting this happen?!"

Changes in the way you understand  
or see the world?

It's hard to have any beliefs at  
all when the world is in chaos  
like this.

After completing this worksheet, what insights have you gained about yourself and how collective trauma may be impacting you?

*I didn't realize how many ways this had been impacting me!*

What are some action steps you can take in the next week to meet yourself where you are and support yourself accordingly? In this section include resources you will look into, coping tools you want to utilize, etc. Be specific in your response.

*In the next week, I want to meet with my therapist again to get some extra support. I realize that it's okay that I need it right now. I also think that I will try to go for a run and get some exercise, eat regular meals, spend some more time doing things I love (playing outside with my kids, dancing, etc.). I think I will also try to call my best friend. I could really use some support right now and I know she could too.*