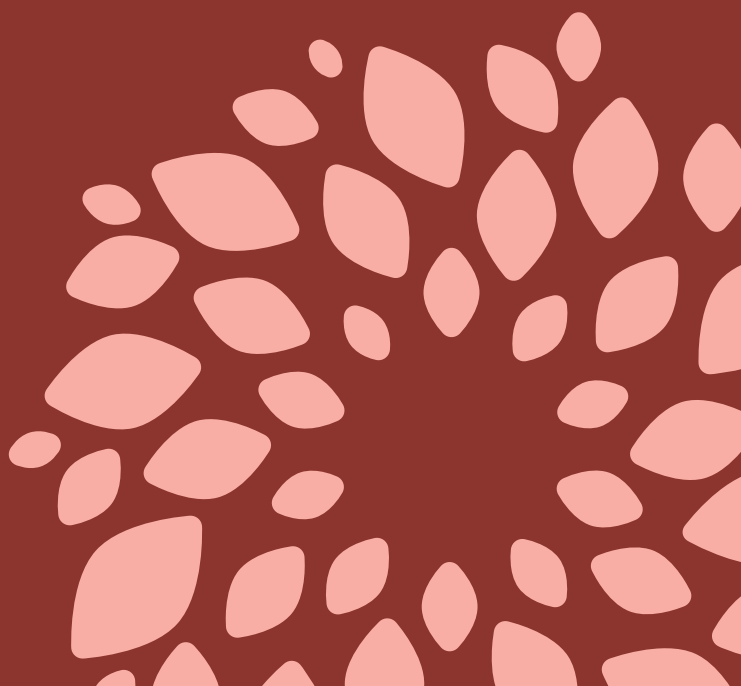




Trauma Programme



What is the Trauma Programme?

The Trauma Programme is a group programme for those who have had experiences of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. Trauma can be understood as an inescapably stressful event that overwhelms people's existing coping mechanisms. These experiences can be unspeakable. Some people who have had trauma in their lives can have enormous difficulty telling people what has happened to them. Our bodies can re-experience terror, rage and helplessness as well as impulses to fight, flee, freeze and appease.

These feelings can be almost impossible to put into words (Van Der Kolk, 2014). It can be hard to describe trauma and how it affects people, but some examples can be found below:



The Compassion-Focused Therapy for Trauma programme, incorporates both group and individual work, memory reprocessing, compassion-focused therapy and attachment theory. Stage one includes safeness, stabilisation and connection. Stage two aims to work on remembering and reprocessing memories. Individual work runs alongside the group in stage two. Stage three focuses on looking forward and reclaiming the participants' life from trauma.

The group is offered over a seven-month period which includes twice-a-week session for six weeks, then a once-a-week session for twelve weeks (during this time participants also engage in individual memory processing therapy work) and then twice-a-week sessions for five weeks. Different people find different stages more challenging. Typically, in stage two, processing memories will increase distress, which decreases for most people as the programme progresses and they work through their trauma memories with the support of the group.

The group incorporates education on trauma, skill-building and therapeutic elements. It allows people to process memories of the traumatic events and move towards reclaiming their future. The group helps patients to develop the ability to treat themselves in a more compassionate way and fosters social connectedness. Trauma doesn't recover in isolation and often trauma can isolate people. Therefore, having a group where individuals learn about themselves and others can help build a connection, a common humanity and a shared supportive experience.

A challenge of any group therapy is that one can be triggered. "Triggers" refer to events or experiences that strongly arouse our emotions or behaviours. In group therapy, we learn how to better recognise when we are triggered, what things trigger us and why and how we impact other people when we are triggered. The group can offer new ways to manage triggers by giving you alternative choices in how to live your life and in how you relate to others.

Who is this group for?

Individuals must be under the care of a consultant in St Patrick's Mental Health Services to avail of this programme. Those most likely to experience some benefit from attending this group are:

- Individuals who struggle with intrusive and repeated memories of a traumatic event or events
- Individuals with a history of adverse childhood experiences
- Individuals who struggle with shame, guilt, or self-blame
- Individuals with negative changes in thoughts and mood that began or worsened after the traumatic event
- Individuals who struggle with avoidance of situations, people and places
- Individuals experiencing additional mental health difficulties
- Individuals who have previous experience of individual or group therapy
- Individuals who have the capacity to regulate their emotions and tolerate distress
- Individuals who are motivated to work on their trauma(s).



Group structure

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
Safeness and Stabilisation	Memory Processing	Looking forward and reclaiming your future
Two half-day sessions a week for six weeks (Monday and Thursday) + Individual session	One individual session a week (10 in total) + One group session a week for 12 weeks	Two half-day sessions a week for five weeks (Monday and Thursday) + Individual review

When and where?

The group takes place on Mondays and Thursdays. This typically is a face-to-face programme but we may be able to offer online versions in the future if there is an interest.

Who runs the groups?

The programme is run by a team of two psychologists and an assistant psychologist.

How are referrals made?

Any service user interested in attending the group can discuss it with their team. Their team psychologist can then refer them to one of the psychologists who facilitates the group to assess whether the group is a good fit for their needs. New referrals are welcome at any time but will be waitlisted until the next cycle commences. Intakes occur once or twice per annum.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us:

- **Adj. Professor Clodagh Dowling**, Director of Psychology SPMHS & Clinical Lead of Trauma Group, Tel: 01 249 3683.
- **Tara Deehan**, Senior Counselling Psychologist, Tel: 01 249 3578.
- **Niamh Willis**, Clinical Psychologist, Tel: 01 249 3770.
- **Assistant Psychologist**, Tel: 01 249 3327.

Feedback

Feedback from past participants about their experience of the Trauma group (Willis, Dowling, Deehan & O'Reilly, 2023).

"[Stage one] was very important. I think it helps to build up trust in the facilitators and trust in the programme, trust that the resources there will help you feel okay and will help you manage your feelings and not get too overwhelmed. It's a hugely important piece. Like I would not have been able to go into that second part without having done the first part."

"I've looked at it in depth. This is the first time I really looked at things in depth. Even though it was difficult, it was good to do because I can put this on a bookshelf and leave it there. I can let it gather dust and I don't need to go back into it again...So there are a lot more books to read and a lot more positive things to do. I need to pack them into the rest of my life."

"Go in with an open mind. To trust the process. The group process is like a river, sometimes the flow is steady sometimes fast (you may feel lost) sometimes there is no flow at all (you feel stuck). In the end, you will get 'there'!"

"I suppose it [compassion] means being kind to yourself, but also being able to say, hey, that's not wise. Is that helpful to maybe pause and say, well, is there another way of looking at this or even just sitting with the emotion and observing it rather than having it constantly be firing? It's about being firm and being aware, trying to be open to other ways of looking at things and questioning these feelings. It's a sort of measured thing. It's not all cuddly and warm. It's something stronger than that."

Feedback (continued)

“You kind of get that all boats rising together kind of scenario where one person might come in in a really bad way and another person would be really good. And there’s a middle ground mesh. We all learned different skills from people within the group.”

“Like at the end of the programme, they asked one thing you leave behind and what will you take? And I was like, oh, I’m leaving behind shame because that’s gone. That has left the building. It is in its rightful place and I really feel lifted from that.”

References

- **The body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma.**
Van der Kolk, B. (2014). Penguin UK.
- **Exploring the Impact of Trauma and the Role of Compassion Before and After a Phase-Orientated Intervention for Complex Trauma.**
Willis N., Dowling C., Deehan T., O’Reilly G. (2023).
European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, Volume 7, Issue 1, March 2023, Article 100308.

St Patrick’s Mental Health Services

James’ Street, Dublin 8, Ireland.

t: +353 1 249 3200 f: +353 1 679 8865

www.stpatricks.ie