

What if I am experiencing the effects of war?

For many, war is so extremely distressing that they experience the unpleasant effects even after they have moved to a new, safer place.

There are many supports available if you or anyone you know is experiencing the effects of war outlined here. Things like Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), and Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR) are all proven ways to treat the effects of war.

If the effects of war are impacting on you, please reach out by:

- 1) Contacting your GP
- 2) Asking to be referred to your local mental health team

For more information, visit:
www.CorkKerryResettlement.com

Asking for help is a sign of great strength, and you are not alone.



A quick strategy to try

If you are experiencing any of the effects of war that we outlined in this leaflet, you may benefit from seeking some extra support from professionals who can help you to feel safe again.

In the meantime, you can try this quick technique to bring your mind back to the present moment if you are feeling a bit overwhelmed:

- ⇒ Notice **5** things that you can see. Describe them.
- ⇒ Find **4** things that you can hear.
- ⇒ Name **3** things that you can touch. Describe the way they feel.
- ⇒ Notice **2** things that you can smell.
- ⇒ Name **1** thing that you can taste.

This strategy is just one of many that you can use to start feeling safe again in the moment. Use it as

Social Inclusion Cork Kerry

Cork Kerry Resettlement Project
DCAFP
HSE, Floor 1
Blackpool, Cork

Phone: 021 492 7140
Fax: 021 492 7147

The Effects of War

How trauma impacts on the mind and body



Social Inclusion Cork Kerry

What is trauma?

When people experience something deeply distressing or dangerous, they can feel its effects long after the moment or event has passed. Living in a war zone and experiencing violence and danger all around teaches your brain that the world is not a safe place. Even if the violence stops, or you move away to a new place, your brain may have a hard time believing that the danger has passed. These experiences, and their impact on how you feel, are what we call 'trauma'.

It is important to keep in mind that the brain is very well designed to watch out for danger and its primary job is to keep us safe and help us survive. It does this without being asked and is always alert, even when we are paying attention to other things. Most of the time, this is exactly what we want it to do! But for people who have experienced extreme distress, such as war, the brain may need extra help learning how to feel safe again.

In this information leaflet, we will go through some of the most common effects of war on the mind and body. We also outline a helpful strategy that people can use to feel safer in the moment.

How trauma affects us

For people who have experienced war, the brain has learned that lots of things are a sign of danger and so it remains even more alert than usual.

What would that look like? If your brain is on extra high alert, you might:

- ⇒ Feel jumpy, or get a fright easily
- ⇒ Feel angry or annoyed often, even without knowing why
- ⇒ Find it hard to concentrate
- ⇒ Find it difficult to sleep
- ⇒ Feel intense fear all of a sudden, even without knowing why

Sometimes the brain decides that the best option is to try and avoid things which bring up these memories or the painful feelings associated with them.

What would that look like? If your brain is trying to keep you safe by avoiding distress, you might::

- ⇒ Try to avoid thoughts, feelings, or talking about the war
- ⇒ Avoid people, places, or things that remind you of the war
- ⇒ Find it hard to remember things about the war
- ⇒ Feel numb, disconnected or detached from loved ones
- ⇒ Lose interest in usual activities

⇒ Find it hard to imagine your future
Sometimes when people have experienced extreme distress, memories of what happened can come back very intensely.

What would that look like? If you are re-experiencing distressing memories, you might:

- ⇒ Suddenly picture images of the war
- ⇒ Feel like you are back in the war even if you are safe at home
- ⇒ Feel upset anytime you are reminded of the war or how you felt during it
- ⇒ Have strong physical feelings in your body when you are reminded of the war
- ⇒ Have nightmares

While these experiences are very distressing, they represent the ways that your brain is trying to protect you. People who have experienced the effects of war often need extra help teaching their minds and bodies how to feel safe again.



Our brain is always watching out for danger