

FM-PTS-01

SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA, EMOTIONS, AND THE ROAD TO STRENGTH

12 Weeks to a Stronger You | Post Traumatic Strength

Downloadable slides • jpts.life

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is what happens in us when something deeply distressing or frightening occurs in our lives. It is not just the event itself — it is the mark that event leaves on your mind, body, and spirit. A car accident, a combat deployment, an assault, or the sudden loss of someone you love can all leave that kind of mark.

Trauma does not only affect how you feel emotionally. It can affect you physically, making you feel exhausted or on edge. It can affect you spiritually, making you question things you used to believe in. It can affect your relationships, your sleep, your ability to trust people, and the choices you make every day.

"Trauma is not what happens to you. It is what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you." — Gabor Maté

TRAUMA VS. PTSD: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Here is something important: having trauma is not the same as having PTSD. After a traumatic event, most people experience distress. That is normal. It is your brain's way of processing something that was too big to handle all at once.

Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) refers to those common reactions — anxiety, hypervigilance, nightmares, or mood changes — that often appear after deployment or a traumatic event. For many people, these symptoms improve or go away within a few weeks as the brain processes what happened.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is different. With PTSD, the brain gets stuck. Instead of gradually processing the event, your mind stays locked in a state of psychological shock. Symptoms do not fade — they persist for more than a month and they begin to seriously interfere with your daily life. Work, relationships, sleep, and your ability to function all take a hit.

PTSD always involves trauma — but trauma does NOT always become PTSD. This is a critical distinction.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Trauma can also open the door to anxiety and depression. These are not signs of weakness. They are medical conditions — as real as a broken bone — and they are common among veterans and others who have experienced significant stress.

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense, or afraid — sometimes without being able to explain exactly why. It can show up as a racing heart, rapid breathing, constant worry, or a feeling of dread that follows you through the day.

Depression is a mood disorder that causes persistent feelings of sadness, emptiness, and a loss of interest in things you used to enjoy. It affects your energy, your sleep, your thinking, and your ability to connect with other people. If you have felt it, you know it is more than just being sad. It is a heavy weight that makes everything harder.

Both anxiety and depression are treatable. Understanding that they exist, and that they have names, is already the first step.

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS — AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Emotions are the conscious feelings we have in response to the world around us — anger, fear, grief, joy, pride, shame. They are powerful, immediate, and they travel through our bodies as real physical sensations.

Here is what most people are never taught: emotions are not bad. They are not the enemy. They are information. When you feel anger, your brain is telling you that something feels unjust. When you feel fear, your brain is warning you of danger. When you feel grief, you are processing a real loss. Emotions exist to help you survive and connect with others.

The problem comes when we confuse feeling an emotion with having to act on it immediately. Emotions push us toward fast reactions. Reason asks us to pause and think. The daily challenge — for everyone, but especially for those who have experienced trauma — is learning to use both.

Your emotions are providing you with information. They are not commands.

THE BRAIN BEHIND IT ALL

When any signal reaches your brain — something you see, hear, smell, or feel — it enters at the base near the spinal cord and travels upward. On the way to your rational, thinking brain (the frontal lobe), it passes through the limbic system. The limbic system is your emotional processing center.

When you experience something threatening, the limbic system can trigger an emotional response before your rational brain even has a chance to weigh in. This is called an emotional hijack. It is why veterans can drop to the ground at a car backfiring — the brain reacted before the rational mind could say "that was just a car."

Emotional intelligence is the skill of recognizing this process in yourself, building a pause between what you feel and what you do, and choosing your response instead of simply reacting. The good news is that this skill can be learned. Your brain is trainable. That is what this entire program is about.

WHAT THIS PROGRAM ASKS OF YOU

This is not a passive course. Reading about trauma will not change you. Hearing a lecture about emotions will not change you. What changes you is the mental work you do on your own — between sessions, in quiet moments when you are willing to look at yourself honestly.

This week, we ask you to start small. Think back on your life and try to identify some of the traumatic events you have experienced. Do not avoid them. Name them. Then ask yourself: Are those events still affecting how you act or feel today? Are you letting them write the next chapter of your story?

Think of your life as a book made up of chapters. Some chapters were brutal. Some were full of courage and sacrifice. None of them define what comes next — unless you let them. You are the author of the chapters still to come.

Victim to Victor. That is the journey. And it starts with understanding where you have been.

LOOKING AHEAD

LOOKING AHEAD — SESSION 2

Next session we will go deeper into the symptoms of PTSD and begin exploring practical, research-backed strategies for coping. Come ready to think, ask questions, and do the work.