

FM-PTS-08

SESSION 8

MORAL INJURY

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"Moral injury is the intense psychological reaction an individual can have as a result of doing something — or not doing something — that goes against their moral code."

WHO IS AFFECTED?

While moral injury is most commonly discussed in the context of military service, it is by no means limited to veterans. The following groups commonly experience moral injury:

- Veterans and active military personnel who were placed in situations with no good choices.
- First responders — police, firefighters, and paramedics — who witness suffering they cannot prevent.
- Healthcare workers who face ethical dilemmas in their professional roles.
- Parents who feel they failed to protect a child.

WHO IS AFFECTED? (CONTINUED)

- Anyone who has been betrayed by a person or institution in a position of authority.

Moral injury does not discriminate. Wherever there are deeply held values and situations that challenge or violate those values, there is the potential for moral injury.

THREE CAUSES OF MORAL INJURY

Moral injury typically arises from one of three situations:

- **Action:** You did something you believed you should not have done. This might include following orders that violated your values, making a decision under extreme pressure that resulted in harm, or participating in something you later recognized as wrong.
- **Inaction:** You did not do something you believed you should have done. You were unable — or felt unable — to intervene, speak up, or protect someone. The feeling that you could have done something and did not is often the most painful form of moral injury.
- **Betrayal:** Someone in a position of authority betrayed your trust in a deeply damaging way. Military leaders who abandoned or misled their troops, institutions that failed to protect their members, or systems that did not honor your sacrifice are common examples.

"Moral injury acts as a barrier to recovery and can lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms. It is important to talk about it with a therapist and your support system."