

MST, For Loved Ones - Second Wounding and Triggers

Defining Second Wounding is something I have been trying to do for with my loved ones, my friends and also other survivors and it has not been easy. Thankfully there is a book I highly recommend to anyone who is or cares about, a survivor of rape or assault. The book is called “***I Can't Get Over It - A Handbook for Trauma Survivors***” by Aphrodite Matsakis, Ph.D. It's a little long but there are certain sections you can focus on right away then go through it completely at your own pace.

A couple of important excerpts from this book are:

PTSD & Secondary Wounding

As important to the healing process as other people are, it's an unfortunate truth that often people do more harm than good. Strangers who don't understand your situation can be unintentionally cruel, but so can those who should know better: family, friends and helping professionals. Instead of being supported, you have been made to feel ashamed of having been a part of the traumatic event in the first place, of your reactions to the event or the symptoms you have developed as a result, or even for asking for help.

Secondary wounding occurs when the people, the institutions, caregivers and others to whom the survivor turns for emotional, legal, financial, medical or other assistance respond in one of the following ways:

Disbelief

Commonly, people will deny or disbelieve the trauma survivor's account of the trauma. Or they will minimize or discount the magnitude of the event(s), its meaning to the victim and its impact on the victim's life.

Blaming the Victim

On some level, people may blame the victim for the traumatic event, thereby increasing the victim's sense of self-blame and low self-esteem.

Stigmatization

Stigmatization occurs when others judge the victim negatively for normal reactions to the traumatic event or for any long-term symptoms he or she may suffer.

Denial of Assistance

Trauma survivors are sometimes denied promised or unexpected services on the basis that they do not need or are not entitled to such services or compensation.

Causes of Secondary Wounding

In essence, secondary wounding occurs because people who have never been hurt or traumatized have difficulty understanding and being patient with people who have been hurt. Secondary wounding also occurs because people who have never been confronted human tragedy are sometimes unable to comprehend the lives of those in occupations that involve dealing with human suffering or mass casualties on a daily basis.

In addition, some people simply are not strong enough to accept the negatives in life. They prefer to ignore the fact that sadness, injustice and loss are just as much a part of life as joy and goodness. When such individuals confront a trauma survivor, they may reject, depreciate or ridicule the survivor because that individual represents the parts of life they have chosen to deny.

Personal Experiences

From my personal experiences I have been through those exact frustrations relating to all those. The worst part is the betrayal felt when you are, for that one second, strong enough to realize how much that hurt you and you hit rock bottom because of it. That pain has caused a lot of extra pain and friction in most of my relationships unnecessarily.

I was crushed, several times and honestly, the closer you are to this person the more it can hurt. Here are some of the good, the bad and the horrific responses given to a victim. These are quotes from actual experiences and for your situations you may need to adapt it a little. And please remember, anger, fear and snap judgments are no one's friend in these cases.

(NOTE TO SURVIVOR: A lot of these are triggers so please, if you choose to read these, understand these are not out to hurt, anger or upset you but to educate others in how to respond.)

Good Reactions

- ▶ “We’ll get through this together.”
- ▶ “I’m right here for anything you need.”
- ▶ “I love you and I will love you forever no matter what.”
- ▶ “I’d be worried if you were okay.” *(Gives a sense of being able to tell you anything, without prettying it up)*
- ▶ “I’ve been thinking of you” *(not about you, but of you, kind of in a thoughtful way, not analytical way)*
- ▶ “Don’t worry about my feelings about this; your healing is the priority.”
- ▶ “You are such a survivor.”
- ▶ “You don’t have to do it alone anymore, I won’t let you.”

Bad Reactions

- ▶ No reaction.
- ▶ “What you’re doing now is right.” (*implying what they were doing before was not right*)
- ▶ “You were asking for it.”
- ▶ “What were you wearing?” or “Guess you won’t wear those kinds of clothes again.” Etc.
- ▶ “Why would you put yourself in that situation?”
- ▶ “Are you telling me the truth?” or “You have been known to exaggerate.” Or “Are you sure this wasn’t a misunderstanding?”
- ▶ "The way you're acting is not ok."
- ▶ “Well you are his wife, how can it be rape?”
- ▶ “You were raped, that must be horrible.” (*Got it, thanks.*)
- ▶ “This will make you stronger.” (*Put better, this can switch lists.*)
- ▶ “Why did you wait so long to say anything?”
- ▶ “You need something to take your mind off this.”
- ▶ “Well be careful who you tell this to.”
- ▶ “But he’s a good person; he wouldn’t have done something like that to anyone.”
- ▶ “You know, trouble seems to circle you. I’m not sure if I can believe it all.”
- ▶ “I don’t need this drama in my life right now.”
- ▶ “What’s wrong with you? Why are you so ultra sensitive?”
- ▶ “Why, after so long, can’t you just get over it?”
- ▶ After a while of related intimacy problems a husband said “We’re basically just coworkers or roommates now.” (*Any comments relating to sex or lack thereof or being different, ANYTHING*)
- ▶ “Well he said it never happened.” Or “I can’t stop being friends with him just because of this.”
- ▶ “Can’t Prozac or something help you get over this faster?”
- ▶ “Couldn’t have been that bad, you didn’t go to the hospital.” Or “Couldn’t have been that bad, you waited this long to report it.” Etc.
- ▶ Recognizing another part of the crime first, like a robbery for example.

- ▶ “You telling everybody this is destroying the family (community, church, circle of friends, etc.).”
- ▶ “Who is it? I’ll kill him!”
- ▶ “Sometimes people dream bad things happened to them and think they’re real, I think you may have dreamt them.”
- ▶ “But I thought you said you liked him?”
- ▶ “I’ve seen you send him signals, you shouldn’t flirt like that and not expect something.”
- ▶ “Why aren’t you taking further action?”
- ▶ “If you tell us who did it we can protect others from him.” *(That may be truer in the civilian world but you need to know your rights and take care of yourself first. I know that sounds selfish but to keep numbers and healthy mentalities up in the armed forces it seems they are keeping the assaulter and transferring the assaulted or washing them out all together.)*
- ▶ “You shouldn’t let that bother you.”
- ▶ “You think about this too much.”
- ▶ “Do you really think YOU should wear that?”

(On all my lists there are more responses I can add, but that is a good start. If anyone reading these wants to add, vent or ask please email me at: info@benefitingveterans.com these will get right to me!)

Note: The above text is found on the site: www.militarysexualtrauma.org. It is a great resource for information about MST and has links to other sites for information.