

What Keeps Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Going?



Psychologists think that memories of traumatic events are processed and stored in the brain differently from non-traumatic memories.

The result is that memories of your trauma might:

- 'Pop' unwanted into your mind.
- Be vivid and emotionally powerful.
- Make you think and feel that the trauma is happening again right now, and that you are in danger.

We can't help but try and make sense of what has happened to us. You will have beliefs about yourself, what you did, and what others might think of you.

If you have PTSD, your beliefs might keep you feeling threatened:

- Your memories of the trauma can be so strong that they make you believe the danger is still present.
- You might blame yourself for things that are not your fault.
- You might think that the symptoms of PTSD mean that you are going mad.

Unprocessed memories

Unhelpful beliefs about your trauma

What keeps it going?

PTSD

Avoidance & safety strategies

If you are bothered by particular situations, whether because they make you feel afraid or ashamed, or because they trigger unwanted memories, it is natural to try to avoid them.

Unfortunately, avoidance and safety strategies mean that your memories remain unprocessed, and you have fewer opportunities to update any unhelpful beliefs.