

Understanding Trauma and the Nervous System

What is Trauma?

- **Trauma** is not just the event itself but the lasting impact it has on your body. Specifically, trauma is the **state of your nervous system** following an event that overwhelms your ability to cope.
- When a traumatic event occurs, your nervous system might enter a heightened state of alertness, often referred to as the "**fight, flight, or freeze**" response, to protect you from harm.
- Trauma occurs when this state of heightened alertness remains unresolved, leaving the nervous system in a constant state of stress, even long after the event has passed.

The Nervous System's Response to Trauma

- Your **nervous system** is designed to keep you safe. During a traumatic event, it reacts as if you are in immediate danger, triggering physical and emotional responses.
- If the trauma is not **resolved, treated, or unburdened**, your nervous system might stay in this heightened state, believing the threat is still present. This ongoing state of alertness is what we refer to as trauma.

What Happens When Trauma Is Unresolved?

- Unresolved trauma means that your nervous system continues to operate as though the danger is ongoing, even if you consciously forget the traumatic event.
- This can lead to chronic stress responses, such as anxiety, hypervigilance, and physical symptoms like chronic pain or fatigue, as your body remains on high alert.

How Can Trauma Be Resolved?

For your nervous system to return to a state of balance, the traumatic event must be:

1. **Reprocessed:**
 - Revisiting and working through the traumatic memory in a safe environment, such as therapy, helps your nervous system recognize that the danger has passed.
2. **Rewritten:**
 - Changing the narrative or meaning attached to the trauma can reduce its emotional impact, helping you see the event in a different light.
3. **Restored:**
 - Restoring balance to your nervous system means helping it return to a state of calm, where it no longer perceives the trauma as an active threat.

Why is This Important?

- Processing trauma is essential to prevent your nervous system from remaining in a constant state of stress. By addressing and resolving trauma, you can help your body recognize that the event is in the past, allowing you to heal and move forward.

Remember: Healing from trauma is a process that often requires professional support, such as therapy. Understanding that trauma is the state of your nervous system—not just the event itself—helps you take the first step toward healing.