

Counseling Tool: Distinguishing Between Anxiety and Trauma-Related Dysfunction

Please note that this tool is designed to provide further information as to the best treatment options for those who may have experienced traumatization. It is not intended to diagnose Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

Please answer the following questions based on your experience with anxiety.

- When did you first start experiencing these symptoms?
- Was there any event or difficult period of life that initiated these symptoms?
- Are your fears connected to something that may have happened in your past, something you're trying to avoid happening again?
- Would you say your anxiety is future-focused (will I make enough money, will I find a spouse), or is it more about preserving/protecting yourself from further harm?

Avoidance:

- What are some stressful situations or experiences that you tend to try to avoid?
- What is the reason you avoid those situations or experiences?
- Was there any situation or experience in your past that causes you to want to avoid similar situations in the present?
- Are there any sounds, smells or sensations that cause you to feel anxious, even if you don't know why?

Negative Emotions:

- When you experience fear and worry, what are some common thoughts that go along with those feelings?

- Do you have thoughts that are absolute in nature (i.e., I am worthless; Nothing will ever change; The world is completely dangerous)?
- Do your anxious thoughts lead to feelings of hopelessness or helplessness?

Somatic (bodily) Symptoms:

- When you're feeling anxious, what happens in your body?
- When these things happen, what thoughts come into your mind about the reasons you're having these symptoms?
- Do you ever have a memory of something that is so strong it feels like it's happening all over again? Do you ever have bad dreams about things that have happened to you?

Three Categories of Similarity Between Anxiety and Traumatization:

- **Avoidance**
 - Anxiety: avoidance of stressful situations, people or places in order to avoid the feeling of anxiety
 - Traumatization: avoidance of memories, thoughts, feelings and situations associated with a traumatic event
- **Negative Emotions**
 - Anxiety: irritability, worry, fear and a sense of being "keyed up"
 - Traumatization: irritability, worry and fear, AND:
 - Hypervigilance: the constant arousal of the senses to ascertain danger at any given moment.
 - Absolutism: beliefs that are extreme and polarized: "The world is completely unsafe," "I am totally broken and unforgivable."
- **Somatic (bodily) Symptoms:**
 - Anxiety: muscle tension, fatigue, sleep disturbance and difficulty concentrating
 - Traumatization: muscle tension, fatigue, sleep disturbance and difficulty concentrating AND:
 - Intrusions: nightmares, flashbacks (remembering an event as if it's currently happening), and intrusive thoughts.