

The Difference Between Stress & Trauma

| Stress | Trauma |
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| Disturbed equilibrium (resulting in temporary imbalance) | Disturbed equanimity (resulting in fragmentation) |
| Mild elevations in stress response which are alleviated when the stressful trigger is removed. | Prolonged activation of stress response systems even long after the stressful trigger is removed |
| Amygdala activates stress axis which stimulates the release of stress hormones temporarily | Amygdala activates stress axis, however, the amygdala and stress axis do not turn off or quit firing their stress signals |
| Hippocampus turns off temporarily then comes back online to turn off stress hormones | Hippocampus eventually damaged by increasing stress hormones, neurogenesis stops, amygdala's branches sprout new branches (which strengthens hypervigilance). |
| Increase in cortisol which turns off somatic reactions caused by stress | Chronically low cortisol + chronically high norepinephrine = high arousal |
| Our thinking brain is not significantly impaired and is, therefore, able to make sense of the experience | Timeless sense of re-experiencing and re-triggering occurring, leaving us unable to fully make sense of the depth of the situation |
| Antidote: Comfort | Antidote: Safety |

** Traumatic experiences are always stressful but stressors are not always traumatic.