

Post Traumatic Growth

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Post-traumatic growth is a relatively new subject for the field of psychology. The idea has been around for a long time, and seems to be gaining in popularity. From sources ranging from ancient religious traditions and mythology to popular psychology and New-Age spiritual gurus, we often hear that we can become better people through suffering. Does what doesn't kill us make us stronger? Or, does it damage us beyond repair, leaving us to wither slowly until we ultimately die of something else entirely? As it turns out, the answer is different for different people.

What Is Post Traumatic Growth?

The concept of post-traumatic growth has captured the attention of research psychologists, individual therapists, and celebrities interested in positive psychology. Before 1980, the view of most psychologists was that any ideas of positive changes coming from tragedy were merely defense mechanisms or delusions. More recently, psychologists have been developing a new attitude towards this phenomenon, hailing it as a healthy way to deal with trauma. So, what is posttraumatic growth?

The Posttraumatic Growth Research Group at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, where the term was coined, defines posttraumatic growth as 'A positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event.'

Post-traumatic growth vs. resiliency

People often mistakenly equate post-traumatic growth with resiliency, but this definition is not valid. Resiliency means that you bounce back to normal after a crisis. Post-traumatic growth goes beyond resiliency. Rather than bouncing back to what is normal, a trauma survivor can reach an even higher level of wisdom and compassion than what was normal prior to the trauma.

Growth Areas in PTG

Researchers have identified five different areas of improvement people can experience after trauma:

Greater appreciation of life

Those who experience post-traumatic growth can become more aware of the value of their own lives and life in general. They feel this appreciation as an emotion. Many also show their appreciation for life by giving back to their local or global community.

A greater appreciation of life can mean experiencing greater joy in small pleasures and everyday life. They may spend more time appreciating nature or doing activities that

make them happy. Their appreciation of life can show up in greater interest in the world around them. It can also increase their motivation to make the world a better place.

Improved relationships with others

Some people who experience post-traumatic growth develop more satisfying relationships with the ones they care about most. They can also become more socially active and gregarious. They often value their relationships more, so they naturally want to do what they can to maintain and improve those relationships. The wisdom they've gained through the traumatic experience gives them a greater ability to make better choices in how to interact with others.

Seeing new possibilities

People who have achieved growth after going through a traumatic event often become more aware of the inherent opportunities in each new experience they encounter later. Because they've lived through something terrible and survived it, they see what is before them more easily, with their mind unclouded by despair. Then, they continue to seek the higher path among those options.

Gaining personal strength

If you're wondering whether Nietzsche's assertion that 'that which doesn't kill us makes us stronger' is true, the answer is yes, but only for those who experience post-traumatic growth. While others become emotionally weaker after trauma, those who can grow after trauma can experience that growth as a gain in personal power and strength.

Spiritual Change

Some people may become more active in their present religious community or embark on a new spiritual quest. Still, others may leave formal religion altogether to embark on their unique spiritual journey. These changes typically come from a profound sense that there is something good in the world that can't be explained easily. This is their higher power, and they desire to connect with it in a deeper way than before.

Conclusion

Researchers have found that two types of people are more likely to have personal growth after trauma. These are extroverts and people who are more open to new experiences. Past PTG can also lead to future PTG for some people.

Researchers still have a lot to learn about PTG, but we can put what we already know into practice. For people who have experienced trauma, a helpful step is to find a therapist to help guide their journey toward healing and PTG.