

Tips from panelists on how they cope with trauma and navigate getting help at work:

List of resources: [Coping with Trauma Tip Sheet](#).

ZACK NEWMAN, investigative data producer with 9NEWS (KUSA-TV)

zacknewman72@gmail.com

@ZackNewsMan

The reason I am here today is that I have covered traumatic events (mass shootings, human trafficking, death, and more) and have offered support to other journalists across the country after they covered their own traumatic event. They didn't know how to cope, just like I didn't. That's when I knew this knowledge gap was wider than just me.

Often journalists are told to take care of themselves, but not how. I have seen a lot of people in the industry that go through trauma and don't have a roadmap. In order to set up the possibility of vulnerability in this convo I am going to share some of my journey outside of any particular event, just going to discuss coping mechanisms as a whole.

1. WHAT TRAUMA IS - As my therapist says, **trauma builds like kindling**. Each traumatic event is like another branch
 - After each mass shooting, story on murder, interview with a relative of a dead person - **it is a branch of kindling that can sneak up on you over time. Secondary trauma, from your coverage, can stack. The more kindling that's there, the easier it is to light.**
 - You are more likely to have a more severe response in the future.
 - Numbness was when I knew I needed help. Too much trauma piled up like kindling, paranoid and quick to anger
2. WHAT TRAUMA RESPONSE LOOKS LIKE - I have PTSD and am on the path to recovery.
 - Loving yourself where you are and the freedom to not be ok while recovering.
 - **Meditation mantra: I am at peace with myself as I am, others as they are and the world as it is.**
 - Thinking became difficult & exhausting: Like getting thoughts through Jello.
 - But over time, as I processed more trauma with EMDR therapy, things got a little easier over time.
 - Zack bucks: Start with \$12. Sometimes it costs a dollar to get out of bed. **Sometimes it takes all \$12.** Be patient with yourself.

- In another metaphor - if you're a car, sometimes gas doesn't get you as far as it usually does.
 - Or the gas tank doesn't hold as much gas as it used to.
 - Or gas costs more than it usually does so you can't go as far as you planned.
 - Or you wake up one morning expecting to go on a road trip, but when you turned the car on the gas light was on. You aren't going anywhere that day.
- **Invite you to think of trauma as you would a broken arm...** Your brain needs to heal, but the process may not be as straightforward as putting your arm in a cast for a couple months.
- People want to help but don't know how. Tell them. Honor what you need.
 - Set boundaries and stick to them. Don't people please to make someone else feel better!
 - "Feel the no" and identify if you need to step away from something. Delegate if necessary.
 - Your body will get what it needs, whether you give it what it asks for or not. If you don't give it a little bit at a time, it'll force it from you. There have been times where I fought it and then got crushed by a wave of PTSD fog later.
- Identify what's a rubber ball and what's a glass ball.
 - Rubber ball tasks are no big deal if you don't do them right away — they bounce and you can get to them on the next bounce.
 - Glass balls will break if dropped. These are tasks that have to happen that day or that moment.
 - Identifying the difference helps you prioritize.
 - This is not an original metaphor and I haven't had luck finding the source.
 - This is one instance of this metaphor being discussed: https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.huffpost.com/entry/work-life-balance_b_1903289/amp
 - When things feel overwhelming and it's a "low day" -- accept it and recalibrate what the day may look like.
 - I find that doing small tasks can help give me momentum (i.e. organizing my calendar or some dishes).
 - Set a timer for 10 minutes. If things still feel overwhelming after that, stop doing them without judgment.

3. HABITS THAT HAVE HELPED - **What would it be like if you could find more ways to develop agency?** For me, trauma manifested in feeling anxious and out of control. The world felt more dangerous.
- Agency - Instead of being at whim of strong emotions, take control for yourself and decide how to navigate through
 - To help feel physically safe, I began doing martial arts and took a concealed carry course.
 - To help feel digitally safe, I enlisted the help of the Committee to Protect Journalists and Freedom of the Press Foundation to understand the steps that I can take.
 - CPJ: <https://cpj.org/>
 - FPF: <https://freedom.press/>
 - Building agency merges with this mantra: **I can trust myself to handle what comes my way. I am confident in my abilities.**
 - **Remove your self-worth from your profession.**
 - You're more than a journalist. Find meaning in other areas as a partner, son/brother, climber, improviser. Journalism isn't everything and it can be dangerous to hinge your self-worth on just your job.
 - Because it's great if it's going well, but if it craters then your self-worth can crater with it.
4. WAYS TO RESOURCE - Invite yourself to resource, or ways to self-soothe, in whatever way works for you.
- **The body will get what it needs, whether it's a little bit at a time or all at once through force when your body shuts down from stress.**
 - If it feels right, stay on top of it, for some, it could make us more susceptible to downward spirals. Try to find avenues outside of drugs and alcohol to avoid creating a dependency.
 - Identify ways to regularly resource yourself. Have a variety of coping mechanisms like a Swiss Army knife. One that's helpful in one situation may not be what you want in another. **Honor what your body needs.**
 - Feel your own strength through exercise that forces fully:
 - Climbing/Martial arts/Being in nature
 - Walking is totally fine! Any movement is a win.
 - Gratitude journal can help restore perspective.
 - Meditation is great - But other types that you may like if sitting isn't your jam:
 - Food mindfulness, walking meditation
 - Process trauma through movement when triggered.
 - I'm a big fan of punching bags and weights when triggered but you may find another calling.

5. **If it feels right... GO TO THERAPY:** Be curious and notice if the trauma is festering. For me, it got worse if I didn't process it.
- Crisis Line in a pinch.
 - 1-844-493-8255 | Text "TALK" to 38255
 - <https://coloradocrisiservices.org/>
 - EMDR and CBT therapies help me clear out the trauma long-term.
 - More on EMDR:
<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/treatments/eye-movement-reprocessing>
 - CBT:
<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral>
 - Find out if your company offers an Employee Assistance Program
 - <https://journalistsresource.org/health/employee-assistance-programs-mental-health/>
 - Therapists can have a sliding scale to help afford therapy. Be sure to ask about it.
 - Some will do therapy for \$15 if that's what you can afford.
 - Use the Psychology Today therapist finder to search:
 - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/counsellors>
 - Many therapists will do a free 30 minute consultation where you can see if it's a good fit.
 - Be open to taking medicine for your mental health.
 - Finding the right combination of medication was crucial in my recovery. It's a tool worth exploring.
 - This is a personal discussion and you should be aware of any possible side-effects.
 - Mental health first aid training can be a good way to resource yourself:
 - <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>
6. **WORKERS COMP:** You may have a workers compensation claim if you experienced severe trauma on the job.
- **Workers comp can help pay for time off due to trauma, therapy appointments and medicine.**
 - Your employer likely has workers comp insurance for this reason.
 - The bureaucracy can be a pain to deal with, so **I recommend enlisting a loved one to help you navigate this.**
 - When these types of tasks were particularly difficult, having a personal advocate made a world of difference.
 - Learn about the rules in your state. There may be a time limit for filing a claim after an incident.

- Some attorneys that specialize in workers comp in your state will do a free consultation.
 - More on workers comp claims in Colorado:
<https://cdle.colorado.gov/injured-workers/file-a-workers-compensation-claim>
7. At work -- You are not your job. You inherently have value regardless of the stories you do, the awards you win or the assignments you get.
- Build guardrails in your life through restorative habits like I discussed above and by building relationships with people outside of journalism. They help ground me and provide regular check-ins.
 - Weekly climbing sessions inside and outdoors benefit my mental and physical health because I am committed to fostering friendships with my climbing partners.
 - Trusting people with my life on the wall (as belay partners) helped me learn how to trust society a little bit more.
 - I'm forced to put away work for the day to make it to Krav Maga, improv and climbing. That sets healthy boundaries with work.
 - "Weak tie" friendships like sparring partners, baristas and gym friends are [also linked to happiness, according to researchers](#).
8. It's important for managers to empower their people to advocate for what they need and to do what they can to meet them there.
- **Consider this an investment in your people.** If you don't help now, you risk burning them out and being forced to hire and train someone new.

As I said at the beginning of my chat, journalists are often exposed to trauma but not taught how to deal with it. I hope our conversation today gives you some tools to guide you through your potential trauma so that you know that you are not alone.

Dart Center

<https://dartcenter.org/>

I have faith and support in the work they're doing more than almost any other effort in our industry. They have a ton of resources - including a wide network of people they could plug you with for peer support.

Journalist Trauma Support Network

<https://www.jtsn.org/>

A Dart Center production, so same statement of support here.