

Determining an Index Trauma

Please read this handout through before beginning the exercise. If you would prefer to complete the exercise with my support during a counseling session, please let me know and we'll schedule it.

Prior to beginning Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), individuals are asked to determine what is termed an "index trauma." Simply put, this is the incident, event, or situation that results in the most problems for you.

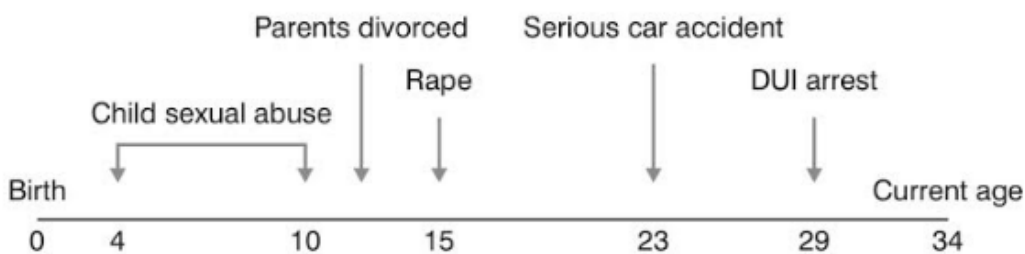
Determining an index trauma can be a stressful process. Before you continue, please download *Self-soothing.pdf* from the client portal. These reassuring suggestions are from *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets, Second Edition*, by Dr. Marsha Linehan, the founder of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).

Please set aside a quiet hour alone to complete this exercise. You will need one or more sheets of paper and a pen. When you are ready to begin, set a timer for 60 minutes. If you finish early, you are done. If you have not finished before 60 minutes, please stop anyway.

Please create a timeline of experiences, from birth to the present, that you found memorably shocking, alarming, painful, or violating. Record as many events as you remember in the time allotted. If you find yourself dwelling on details from a few events, note which events, then please shift your attention back to completing the timeline.

Include forced physical contact, including punishments and fights, other punishments, forced sexual contact, deaths in the family, losses, moves, injuries, acquired physical conditions or illnesses, surgeries, incarcerations, witnessing or experiencing verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual assaults, experiences in, or with, the armed forces or the police force, community violence, or natural disaster.

This is an example of a timeline from Resick et al. Some clients find it helpful to turn a page horizontally to create more room. Some clients have found it helpful to create a vertical timeline as a list. Please choose a format that is most useful to you.



When you have completed the timeline, consider answers to these questions: "Which trauma do you have the most intrusive memories or nightmares about?", "When you are tired or sick, or your defenses are down, which event pops into your mind?", "Which event are you hoping that you won't have to talk about in counseling or don't want to tell anyone about?", or "Which event do you avoid thinking about at all costs?"

Please put aside your timeline and the accompanying questions and leave them until we meet. Please bring your timeline to our session and we'll discuss which experience might serve as your "index trauma" for CPT work.

Please practice self-care and self-kindness and follow the suggestions in the "Self-Soothing" handout.