

Adult Department Trauma Unit
The unit for the study of trauma and its aftermath
April 2004

For practical information about the Trust and maps on how to get here, please see the dark blue 'Patient Prospectus'.

The Unit for the Study of Trauma and Its Aftermath is a specialist unit within the Tavistock Clinic Adult Department. There are many different kinds of psychotherapy and also counselling, but in the Adult Department of the Trust we offer psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The work of the Unit for the Study of Trauma and Its Aftermath is informed by the same ideas and ways of working.

What is psychoanalytic psychotherapy?

Difficult and painful experiences in the past can affect the way we behave and interact in the present. This can happen even if the link between the past and the present does not seem obvious. We believe that earlier life experiences and relationships play a part in the particular meaning that a trauma takes on for a person. Psychotherapy provides a safe place to talk through your emotional distress and think about what might have caused it.

Who do we see in the Trauma Unit?

The Unit sees people over the age of 21 who remain troubled by a traumatic event or series of events or experiences, which took place recently or in the past. Examples might include being involved in a road traffic accident, or having been assaulted or having something traumatic happen to someone close to you, such as the suicide of or violence towards a family member.

What does the Unit offer?

People referred to the Unit are in the first instance usually offered a consultation of up to four sessions. Sessions usually last around one and a quarter hours. You will be able to talk about yourself and whatever aspects of your current and past experience you feel is relevant.

You may find that the consultation in itself helps you to understand your experience and reaction to the trauma better and you might feel that you don't need any further help. On the other hand it may be that you will need more than the consultation and the clinician may continue to offer you sessions.

Alternatively some form of regular treatment in the Department might be what you need or you could be referred for more help elsewhere.

It will be part of the consultation to discuss with you the question of further help, if appropriate.

What are the ongoing treatments offered in the Adult Department?

Individual therapy

Usually 50-minute sessions, once a week, for 1 year. However, brief, intermittent or more intensive therapy may be offered depending on circumstances.

Group therapy

Up to 90-minute sessions with a group of up to 8 people, once a week, usually for 2–3 years.

Couples therapy

Up to 90-minute sessions, every 2–4 weeks for couples. Therapy may be brief or last over a year.

If I am offered ongoing treatment, how long will I have to wait for it?

There is at times a considerable wait, sometimes for as long as one year. There is generally less of a waiting list for group therapy. However, your clinician will discuss this with you during the consultation.

Who are the clinicians?

The clinical staff in the Adult Department are psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, nurses, social workers and other professionals with backgrounds in mental health work. All clinicians have had either extensive training in psychoanalytic psychotherapy or are having further training under supervision in the Department. The staff of the Unit for the Study of Trauma and Its Aftermath are either experienced clinicians who also have special expertise in the aftermath of trauma, or are qualified mental health professionals gaining further experience in this area, under supervision.

What can I expect of the clinician?

It is common to feel that the clinician says very little, but what happens in a consultation is not an everyday conversation. The consultation is a private place where you can talk openly about yourself with an experienced person whose aim is to understand as much about you as they can. The clinician will make comments to help you understand your reaction to the traumatic experience. Clinicians are also interested in what happens in a session itself as well as in your history.

How can this help?

Many people are helped to talk about painful emotions and thoughts they have not allowed themselves to express before and this can bring both a sense of relief and understanding to their current situation.

Will my experience be respected if I come from a minority community?

We want to provide a service that meets the needs of all members of the community. Our services are available to everyone regardless of race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, age, religion or abilities. If you have any worries on these matters, you can discuss it with us when you come for your first appointment. If needed we will try to arrange for an interpreter or for you to be seen by someone who speaks your language.

Where do I go when I arrive at the Clinic?

When you arrive at the Tavistock Clinic, please report to the reception desk in the entrance hall on the ground floor. You will be asked to wait in the waiting-room and the receptionist will contact the Adult Department to say that you have arrived. When the clinician is ready to see you, you will be asked to take the lift to the 4th floor. The clinician will wait for you in the lobby.

How do I confirm, change or cancel an appointment?

Please call the Department on 0207 447 3742. You will speak to a clinical secretary who will be able to help you.