

# TRAUMA

## PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH

### What is Trauma?

Trauma is a complex reaction to an event that is perceived to be life threatening or threatening to the dignity of oneself or another. Trauma impacts how we think, feel, create memories, behave and relate to others.

### *Examples of events that can lead to trauma:*

- difficult pregnancy
- difficult labour and delivery
- "normal" pregnancy and delivery
- unexpected outcomes
- stillbirth or miscarriage
- NICU experience
- "pre-trauma" about labour and delivery (imagining how scary it may be)
- pre-term delivery
- reminder of previous trauma
- physical or developmental concern with mom or baby

# **33-45% OF WOMEN EXPERIENCE BIRTH AS TRAUMATIC.**

**Here's how trauma from birthing has been  
described by mothers who have experienced it:**

**Out of control.**

**Just weird, off, not okay or myself.**

**Emotion and tears out of nowhere.**

**Not ready to leave the hospital.**

**Seeking answers.**

**Powerless.**

**Can't remember details.**

**Vulnerable.**

**Isolation from motherhood.**

**Degraded.**

**Dreams shattered.**

**Inhumane.**

**Wrong.**

**Can't stop thinking about it.**

**Invisible.**

**Want to talk about it over and over.**

**Spiraling downward.**

**Disconnected.**

**Numb.**

**Rollercoaster of emotion: panic, grief, pain, anger,  
depression, wanting it to end.**

**Nightmares.**

**Hurdle to breastfeed.**


**Betrayed.**

**Can't stop crying.**

**ROOTED  
SUPPORT**

[www.rootedsupport.ca](http://www.rootedsupport.ca)

The information on this handout has been researched and compiled by Registered Psychologist, Kristin Romanoski. If any part of this document is altered, the information can no longer be relied upon as information provided by a Registered Psychologist. If you're unsure, please feel free to contact Kristin directly. © 2020



**An event isn't traumatic because of the details of what happened but because of how the details were experienced by the individual.**

## **Themes about Why An Experience Might Be Traumatic**

- 1. Feeling uncared for during the experience.**
- 2. Feeling unheard, neglected or abandoned during the experience. Believing there wasn't communication or consent.**
- 3. Feeling a sense of trust was broken and feeling powerless.**
- 4. The message that the end justified the means (i.e. "well, the baby is safe") and ignoring at whose expense and at what cost.**
- 5. Feeling a loss of control over your body or out of body experience.**

# **Sometimes We Only Become Aware of Trauma after Certain Reminders**

- When trying to breastfeed.**
- On the anniversary of the date of the event.**
- When passing by the hospital.**
- When getting pregnant again.**

## **Healing From Trauma Can Involve These Steps**

- Understanding your symptoms and how they are "normal" reactions to a traumatic event.**
- Creating a new and preferred narrative to replace the old memory.**
- Coping with reminders of the traumatic event.**
- Coping skills and emotion regulation for the distress caused by the trauma.**
- Talking about the event.**
- Examining thoughts you have related to the event.**
- Feeling and exploring emotions related to the trauma.**