

A New Perspective: Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) from COVID-19

Most of us have heard about Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I wonder, though, have you ever heard of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)?

The term Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) was coined in 1995 by Richard Tedeschi, PhD and Lawrence Calhoun, PhD to focus on the idea of growth as a potential consequence of grappling with trauma. In other words, those who experience PTG, experience positive transformation that they wouldn't have otherwise experienced if the trauma hadn't occurred.

Today, as COVID-19 continues to spread, there is no question that all of us are being impacted--some more severely than others. However, alongside this tragic pandemic also lies an opportunity for *growth* and *positive transformation* on both personal and societal levels. With COVID-19, elements of Posttraumatic Growth might include the following:

- **New Opportunities or Possibilities in Life**
 - Personal: Utilizing resources we've had but haven't utilized; choosing to look at this time as an opportunity to not only re-evaluate what we really want in life--personally, professionally, and relationally--but also having the time to exercise our creativity and to make the changes necessary to support our visions.
 - Societal: Setting our egos aside and listening to our experts for structure, newly created policies, and safety procedures so we can foster global health.
 - **Reflection question**: *What new opportunities or possibilities in life have surfaced/are you choosing to pay attention to as a result of this pandemic?*
- **Increased Sense of Personal Strength**
 - Personal: Learning that even when things become a newfound level of challenging--emotionally, mentally, physically, and financially--we're still in control of our thoughts, how we choose to behave in response to how we feel, and that we're capable of living through something much more difficult than we ever thought possible.
 - Societal: Learning that we're stronger working together and that personal strength sometimes means having the courage to call on others for help
 - **Reflection question**: *What strengths have you noticed in yourself as well as in others since the onset of COVID-19?*
- **Changes in Relationships with Others**
 - Personal: Being given the opportunity and time to re-evaluate who we value and truly want in our lives; investing more time and energy into those people and relationships that we now know to be of the utmost importance.
 - Societal: Lessening political polarization, coming together to serve not just our parties, but our world.
 - **Reflection question**: *How has this event positively impacted your relationship with yourself and others? If identifying this is challenging, think of how you would like it to positively impact the relationship you currently have with yourself and others.*
- **Greater Appreciation for Life in General**
 - Personal: Reconnecting with the reality of our mortality and how precious life really is; slowing down and noticing the beauty that has always

surrounded us but perhaps we haven't noticed because we've been too busy.

- **Societal:** Setting our differences aside and being grateful that we can learn so much about ourselves by engaging in conversation where diversity of thought and ways of living are present.
- **Reflection question:** *How has your appreciation for life been positively influenced since the onset of COVID-19?*
- **Deepening of Spiritual Life**
 - **Personal:** Reconnecting with or discovering who we are by engaging in practices that bring us a sense of peace -- for some this is reconnecting with the outdoors, writing, praying, connecting with others, practicing yoga or meditation, working out, etc.
 - **Societal:** Accepting and respecting each other's spiritual differences and how we choose to find our own sense of peace in the midst of global suffering.
 - **Reflection question:** *How are you creating your own sense of inner peace during this time? If no particular method, what would you like to introduce into your life to support your own sense of inner peace?*

In the midst of and after trauma, opportunities for growth are possible the more we make ourselves aware of it. The chances of Posttraumatic Growth increase when we have a support system. We need each other; we need to let ourselves ask for help and allow others to lean on us when we have capacity.

As this pandemic unfolds, I invite you to share this, to learn more and engage in conversations, and to pay attention to how you and those around you are exhibiting elements of Posttraumatic Growth.

Sarah Schaub, APCC, serves as a Resilience Trainer at the UCLA/VA Veteran Family Wellness Center. Sarah is a strong supporter of diversity and inclusivity who is constantly striving not only to identify how each part of a system (familial or organizational) affects the whole, but also how each part can shift in order to facilitate desired change. Her current focus is to facilitate further resilience and posttraumatic growth with Veterans and their families.



The UCLA/VA VFWC is honored to continue to serve and support the military-connected community during challenging times. For information, resources, and appointments please call our Family Services Coordinator at (310) 478-3711 x 42793 or email info@vfwc.ucla.edu