

Beyond Resilience

Post-Traumatic Growth Toolkit for Therapists

Included Inside:

Books, Videos, and Websites

Peer-reviewed Articles

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Worksheet Sources



Introduction

What is Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)?

Simply stated, Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) refers to the positive life changes that can follow a trauma or crisis event. The counterpart to PTG is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the more widely known combination of negative outcomes that disrupt lives. Yet, many people are also able to find meaning in their trauma or crisis, and use that to achieve a quality of life that is even better than it was before.

I say people may **also** achieve PTG because sometimes the symptoms of PTSD can persist. In spite of those symptoms, attaining PTG can alleviate anxiety and depression, thus improving the overall quality of life for clients.

Five Common Domains of PTG

New
Possibilities

Deeper
Relationships

Personal
Strength

Spiritual or
Existential
Change

Appreciation
for Life

Schubert et al., 2015, p. 469). Schubert, C. F., Schmidt, U., & Rosner, R. (2015). Posttraumatic growth in populations with posttraumatic stress disorder: A systematic review on growth-related psychological constructs and biological variables. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 23(6), 469–486.

<https://bouldercrest.org/resources/ptg-domains-an-overview/>

Understanding PTG

PTG Videos

Science of People provides an [overview of PTG in 4 minutes with this video](#).



Támara Hill, MS, LPC provides a [more extensive description of PTG in this 12 minute video](#). As a therapist, Ms. Hill focuses on “a practical understanding” useful for the therapy context.



Bonus: Feature Length Documentary

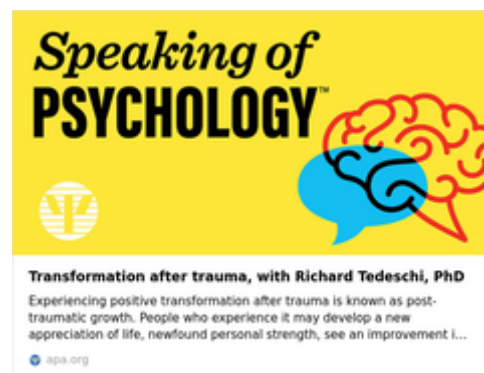
In this award-winning 80 minute documentary, Greg Storm provides an in-depth exploration of PTG. The film focuses on the stories of 10 survivors of traumas along with their families. The cases of PTG provide guidance and advice about overcoming adversity and emerging stronger.



More details

Tedeschi and Calhoun are widely regarded as early pioneers and research authorities on the concept of Posttraumatic Growth. For an in-depth read on the concept you can refer to their book:

Tedeschi, R. G., Park, C. L., & Calhoun, L. G. (Eds.). (1998). Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes in the aftermath of crisis. Routledge.



[Podcast interview](#)

Characteristics of PTG

Five Common Domains of PTG

New possibilities

- Discovering new hope by recognizing possibilities for the future that weren't perceived before the crisis.

Deeper relationships

- Often relationships are tested when there is a crisis, and those that endure may be even stronger for having survived the trauma. Additionally, telling others about trauma requires vulnerability that can lead to deeper relationships

Personal strength

- At times, traumatic events can bring to the surface strengths that were previously hidden or obscured. In the process of coping or problem solving, new strengths could also be discovered.

Spiritual and existential change

- Given the life or death nature of many traumatic events, some will explore questions about the meaning of life. Some will discover a new mission, such as helping others who have survived similar traumas.

Appreciation for life

- Even when they don't grapple with existential questions, some will acquire a new appreciation for life in general. Survival can be seen as a 'second chance.'

Phases of PTG

Education

- Learning about both the painful consequences of trauma as well as the possibilities for growth in the aftermath

Regulation

- Recovering from the main effects of the trauma, someone reaches a state of clarity and reflect on their experiences

Disclosure

- Openness about disclosing aspects of the trauma to others, thus gaining social support

Story

- Integrating the trauma experience into the overall life experience, forming a cohesive narrative

Service

- Desiring to 'give back' by helping make a positive difference in the lives of others; often with similar trauma.

<https://bouldercrest.org/resources/ptg-phases-overview/>

If you are interested in exploring this model in depth, you could consider certification with the Posttraumatic Growth Resource Center: “The PTG Certification Program is designed by Dr. Richard Tedeschi, the founder of the science of Posttraumatic Growth. Those seeking certification will complete an instructionally verified course in clinical aspects of PTG and be challenged to apply the science of PTG in your own professional practice.”

<https://bouldercrest.org/program/ptg-certification/>

PTG Research

From the Posttraumatic Growth Resource Center

Tedeschi, R.G., Calhoun, L.G. and Groleau, J.M. (2015). Clinical Applications of Posttraumatic Growth. In Positive Psychology in Practice, S. Joseph (Ed.).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118996874.ch30>

This book chapter examines research literature focused on the concept of PTG. They explain the types of positive changes that people can experience in the aftermath of trauma. They also provide background information about the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (the most widely used measure of PTG).

In addition to theory and research, this book chapter focuses on clinical applications. They illustrate how therapy can provide the safe context for working through the vulnerability required for PTG.

Calhoun, L.G. and Tedeschi, R.G. (1998), Beyond Recovery From Trauma: Implications for Clinical Practice and Research. Journal of Social Issues, 54: 357-371.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1998.tb01223.x>

As above, this article has a specific focus on the use of PTG concepts in the therapeutic context. They examine the relationship between PTG and factors such as distress and psychological well-being. They note potential challenges in therapeutic intervention fostering PTG, but also highlight ways for the therapist to support the ongoing growth of their clients.

Tedeschi, R. G., & Moore, B. A. (2021). Posttraumatic growth as an integrative therapeutic philosophy. Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 31(2), 180–194.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/int0000250>

In this more recent article, the concept of PTG is integrated into therapy work in line with specific intervention techniques. Pulling in concepts from CBT, Narrative Therapy, Interpersonal Therapy, and Existential Therapy, they explore how PTG can be utilized as a crucial support. They conclude the article with a case example.

Assessment

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

The assessment developed by Tedeschi & Calhoun is by far the most widely used measure, and multiple versions of the instrument are available as described at the Posttraumatic Growth Resource Center. Versions include:

- **Posttraumatic Growth Inventory - Expanded (PTGI-X):** The updated PTGI includes items that assess all five of the domains described on page 4. The original 21-item scale included only two items measuring the domain of Spiritual and existential change. We recommend the more holistic 25-item expanded version with four additional items for this important domain.
 - Tedeschi, R. G., Cann, A., Taku, K., Senol-Durak, E., & Calhoun, L. G. (2017). *The posttraumatic growth inventory: A revision integrating existential and spiritual change*. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 30(1), 11-18.
 - As of 19 Feb 2024, a copy of the article can be downloaded here:
<https://cdn.givecloud.co/s/files/1/0000/1026/files/2017-02806-001.pdf>
- **Posttraumatic Growth Inventory - Short Form (PTGI-SF):** The authors created a compact 10-item version of the measure with two items for each of the five domains.
 - Cann, Arnie, Calhoun, Lawrence G., Tedeschi, Richard G., Taku, Kanako, Vishnevsky, Tanya, Triplett, Kelli N. and Danhauer, Suzanne C.(2010) 'A short form of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory', *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, 23: 2, 127 – 137.
 - As of 19 Feb 2024, a copy of the article can be downloaded here:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26652367_A_short_form_of_the_Posttraumatic_Growth_Inventory
- **Posttraumatic Growth Inventory for Children (PTGI-C):** An adaptation of the original 21-item measure was created as part of a study on PTG with children in the aftermath of the 1999 Hurricane Floyd.
 - Kilmer, Ryan & Gil-Rivas, Virginia & Tedeschi, Richard & Cann, Arnie & Calhoun, Lawrence & Buchanan, Teresa & Taku, Kanako. (2009). *Use of the revised Posttraumatic Growth Inventory for Children (PTGI-C-R)*. *Journal of traumatic stress*. 22. 248-53. 10.1002/jts.20410.
 - As of 19 Feb 2024, a copy of the article can be downloaded here:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24446517_Use_of_the_revised_Posttraumatic_Growth_Inventory_for_Children_PTGI-C-R

Resources for clients

Worksheets from PositivePsychology.com

PositivePsychology.com is a useful resource with free material supporting the health and wellness of clients. They have a section called “23 Post-Traumatic Growth Worksheets for Therapy.” <https://positivepsychology.com/post-traumatic-growth-worksheets/>

Our recommendation is to focus on the “16 PDF Trauma Worksheets” and particularly the ones listed here, as many of the other resources are more focused on recovery from PTSD rather than PTG.

- Exploring past resilience
- Yogic breathing
- Anchor breathing
- Focus on the present for radical acceptance
- EMDR Worksheet
- Growing stronger from trauma



Post-Traumatic Growth Guidebook by Schwartz

Dr. Arielle Schwartz has many useful resources on her website for the Center for Resilience Informed Therapy (<https://drarielleschwartz.com/>). She has authored several books related to PTG including a focus on Complex PTSD and incorporating yoga practices into therapeutic work.

The Post-Traumatic Growth Guidebook is sold for \$18 at Amazon.com, or \$12 for the Kindle edition. Please consider using her Amazon Affiliate links at her website.

While there are many books related to PTG, we recommend this one for consideration because it includes “60 practices that illuminate a path to trauma recovery with effective, research based strategies that facilitate resilience and enhance post-traumatic growth.” She outlines a sequence of healing and growth practices within a holistic framework.

You can find more information about the book here:

<https://drarielleschwartz.com/the-post-traumatic-growth-guidebook-dr-arielle-schwartz/>

Books for starting Post-Traumatic Growth

The Beauty of a Darker Soul: Overcoming Trauma Through the Power of Human Connection, by Joshua Mantz

In this book, former Army Major Josh Mantz explores his post-traumatic growth. He was shot while serving in Iraq, and was technically deceased for almost 15 minutes. Remarkably, he revived and now shares insights that he has discovered in the aftermath of that experience. He provides an inspirational story about finding meaning in suffering and then offering hope to others.

Bouncing Forward: Transforming Bad Breaks into Breakthroughs, by Michaela Haa

Survivor stories from twelve individuals are related in this edited collection of interviews, and they are paired with suggestions for building post-traumatic growth. The author integrates concepts from narrative, psychology, and Buddhist practice in providing new perspectives on crisis and trauma. According to the authors, the book “offers groundbreaking research and more than 60 tried-and-true methods to turn adversity into opportunities.”

Man’s Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl

In this classic book, the author explores the vital nature of finding meaning in life, a core part of post-traumatic growth. He uses his own narrative of enduring Nazi concentration camps to reinforce the ideas that form the basis of his work as a psychiatrist. This book is a powerful testament to the power of the mind to overcome even the most grueling trials.

TIP: Consider one of these two workbooks as a resource to support a client with getting more out of Frankl’s book:

A Workbook to increase your Meaningful and Purposeful Goals, by Hutzell and Eggert, 2009 pdf edition.

This self-help workbook includes many ‘paper-and-pencil’ exercises for clients and it is free online: https://www.viktorfrankl.org/assets/pdf/hutzell_workbook_2009.pdf

Meaning-Centered Therapy Workbook, by Marie Dezelic.

This workbook includes potential handouts that you can use in your practice: <https://www.drmariedezelic.com/post/meaning-centered-therapy-workbook>

Resources for therapists

As a mental health professional you are more than likely familiar with trauma from multiple angles. Many therapists have endured their own Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and as adults, clinicians have crisis experiences just like everyone else.

If trauma or crisis have been a source of motivation or information for your professional work then you have been on your own Post-Traumatic Growth journey!

In addition to the general PTG resources included in this toolkit, we created this section to support your self-care.

Challenges from trauma care



Even if you have never personally experienced a trauma or crisis, you might encounter some challenges when helping clients work theirs. While there are significant benefits from this work, potential impacts reported by therapists include:

- **Vicarious Traumatization (VT):** At times a therapist's views about themselves or the world in general can shift while processing trauma with a client. Their sense of safety and control might come into question.
- **Compassion Fatigue (CF):** Emotional strain from extensive work with someone coping with traumatic stress.
- **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS):** The pattern of symptoms for STS closely resemble PTSD and it can happen when a therapist is frequently exploring trauma histories with clients. Therapists report avoidance, hyperarousal, low mood, irritability, and reduced self-efficacy.
- **Burnout:** With burnout there is emotional and physical exhaustion that severely impact work and quality of life.

For more information see this resource from the VA:

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/care/toolkits/provider/workingWithTraumaSurvivors.asp>

Assessment

The ProQOL (Professional Quality of Life Scale) is a free tool that you can use to measure both positive and negative impacts of working with clients who have experienced traumatic stress. There are sub-scales for compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout.

In addition to the original version that was for professionals in general, there is now a ProQOL Health version, intended specifically for healthcare workers.

<https://proqol.org/proqol-measure>



Quick Tips



The **4-7-8 Breathing Technique** is perfect for those times when you don't have much time but need to lower your stress (e.g., in between client sessions):

1. Try to sit quietly and close your eyes.
2. Place the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth, behind your top front teeth.
3. Completely breathe out with your mouth. (It helps to make a sigh or whooshing sound).
4. Close your mouth, and breathe in through your nose for a count of 4 seconds.
5. Hold you breath, and count 7 seconds.
6. Slowly breathe out through your mouth, to a count of 8 seconds.
7. Repeat this process 3 times.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation takes a little longer, but it could be particularly beneficial at the start and/or end of your work:

1. Find a comfortable position where you can move freely.
2. Choose which muscles to focus on, and prepare to go head to toe, or vice versa.
3. Starting with the first muscles, breathe in and tense up for 5-10 seconds.
4. Breathe out and quickly rest the muscles.
5. Relax for 10 seconds.
6. Repeat this process, working with one part of your body at a time.

More self-care

Self-Compassion with Dr. Kristin Neff (<https://self-compassion.org/>):

As a therapist, you offer compassion to others, and it's likely that you do that both in and out of the office. With self-compassion, we turn our attention inward and offer kindness and understanding to ourselves. Dr. Neff's research has found that self-compassion helps with coping and resilience.

How much self-compassion do you have? Dr. Neff offers a free self-test:
<https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-test/>

You might also consider doing the 5-Day Self-Compassion Challenge through her website.

Additional self-help strategies recommended for therapists:

- Cognitive strategies can include mindfulness, examining and changing beliefs, perspective-taking, and letting go. These strategies have been shown to reduce Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and burnout.
- Meaning-based strategies such as concentrating on the aspects of work that are most important to you can also help reduce work-related stress or burnout.
- To avoid the overwhelm of your workload, many have found it helpful to intentionally reconnect to personal values, whether connected to spirituality or another source.
- Seeking social support can also have a significant impact on coping ability and recovery from STS, burnout, and general work-related stress. It can be particularly helpful to find sources of support that have empathy grounded in experiences similar to yours.

Also see the Tips for healthcare professionals: Coping with stress and compassion fatigue, from SAMHSA. (https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/PEP20-01-01-016_508.pdf)

About the Author



Lived Experience Academy

The Lived Experience Academy is the only website dedicated to Post-Traumatic Growth with a specific focus on growth following a suicidal crisis (Post-Suicidal Growth).

We have a free, private, welcoming, and positive community of mental health professionals who have lived experience related to suicide. The curated resources support ongoing personal and professional development around Post-Suicidal Growth.

If you have an interest in this topic, please join our community:

<https://livedexp.academy>

DeQuincy Meiffren-Lézine, Ph.D.



I'm a suicide attempt survivor and internationally-recognized scholar with more than 25 years of experience in suicide prevention.

Following advocacy work on the road to my Sc.B. from Brown University, I earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from UCLA. My psychology background was augmented by a postdoctoral fellowship in epidemiology and public health at the University of Rochester.

Near the end of my time as a postdoctoral fellow, I wrote the book *Eight Stories Up*, blending guidance from clinical research and lived experience in a book written for adolescents. In 2015, I was honored to be awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the SAMHSA Voice Awards.

While serving as the principal author of **The Way Forward** for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, I became the inaugural Chair of the Attempt Survivor and Lived Experience Division of AAS and served as a Co-Chair of the Consumer Survivor Committee for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

As the Director of the [Lived Experience Academy](https://livedexp.academy), **I enjoy supporting and encouraging life promotion as part of a positive lived experience community.**