

Open Your Class With This Tomorrow- *Upside*

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Post-Traumatic Growth

Background:

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Provide students with the *DSM-5* criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder or have them review the relevant pages in their textbook.

Post-traumatic Growth (PTG)

Provide students with the following background information on post-traumatic growth from the website of the Post-traumatic Growth Research Group in the Department of Psychological Science at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, because it is not likely included in their textbook.

PTG, according to the Post-traumatic Growth Research Group, is a positive change experienced because of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event. Although the Research group coined the term post-traumatic growth, the idea that human beings can be changed by their encounters with life challenges, sometimes in radically positive ways, is not new. The theme is present in ancient spiritual and religious traditions, literature, and philosophy. What is reasonably new is the systematic study of this phenomenon by psychologists, social workers, counselors, and scholars in other traditions of clinical practice and scientific investigation.

Post-traumatic growth tends to occur in five general areas.

1. Post-traumatic growth can create a positive change in relationships with others in which some people experience closer relationships with some specific people or an increased sense of connection to others who suffer.
2. A sense that new opportunities have emerged from the struggle, opening possibilities that were not present before.
3. Increased sense of one's own strength – "if I lived through that, I can face anything."
4. A deepening of one's spiritual life; however, this deepening can also involve a significant change in one's belief system.
5. Post-traumatic growth is experienced by some people as a greater appreciation for life in general.

Clarifications from the key researchers on Post-traumatic Growth (PTG)

Most of us, when we face very difficult losses or great suffering, will have a variety of highly distressing psychological reactions. **Just because individuals experience growth does not mean that they will not suffer.** Distress is typical when we face traumatic events.

We most definitely are not implying that traumatic events are good – they are not. But for many of us, life crises are inevitable, and we are not given the choice between suffering and growth on the one hand, and no suffering and no change, on the other.

Post-traumatic growth is not universal. It is not uncommon, but neither does everybody who faces a traumatic event experience growth.

Our hope is that you never face a major loss or crisis, but most of us eventually do, and perhaps you may also experience an encounter with post-traumatic growth.

Part I – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Discussion

Directions: Have students working in small groups discuss potential answers to the following questions. You may also have them look for research that either strengthens or weakens their hypothesis.

- 1) How would a researcher working from the biopsychosocial perspective explain PTSD? Answer this by providing specific biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to PTSD. **Note** – some factors can be listed in more than one category.

Biological factors:

Psychological factors:

Social factors:

- 2) How would a researcher working within the diathesis-stress model explain PTSD? What are some of the specific predisposing and precipitating factors in the disorder?

Part II - Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory Evaluation

Listed below are 21 areas sometimes used to measure positive change after traumatic events on the *Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory* created by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun from the University of North Carolina. Participants are asked to rate on a scale of 0-5 regarding how much they felt they changed for the better after the trauma.

- 0 = I did not experience this change because of my crisis
- 1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree
- 2 = small degree
- 3 = a moderate degree
- 4 = a great degree
- 5 – a very great degree as a result of my crisis

Directions: Research indicates that individuals with PTG experience growth in one or more of the following five areas. Evaluate each of the statements in the inventory and indicate which area of growth the question is likely measuring. *Note:* Some are used more frequently than others.

1. Strengthened relationships
2. Openness to new possibilities
3. Personal strength
4. Increased spirituality
5. Greater appreciation for life

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Post-traumatic Growth Inventory

	PTG Inventory Statement	Area of PTG Question is Targeting
1	I changed my priorities about what is important in life.	
2	I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.	
3	I have developed new interests.	
4	I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.	
5	I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.	
6	I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.	
7	I established a new path for my life.	
8	I have a greater sense of closeness with others.	
9	I am more willing to express my emotions.	
10	I know that I can handle difficulties.	
11	I can do better things with my life.	
12	I am better able to accept the way things work out.	
13	I can better appreciate each day.	
14	New opportunities are available, which wouldn't have been otherwise.	
15	I have more compassion for others.	
16	I put more effort into my relationships.	
17	I am more likely to try to change things that need changing.	
18	I have stronger religious faith.	
19	I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.	
20	I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.	
21	I better accept needing others.	

Part III Post-Traumatic Growth Discussion

- 1) How would a researcher working from the biopsychosocial perspective explain PTG? Answer this by providing specific biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to PTG.

Biological factors:

Psychological factors:

Social factors:

- 2) Conduct some research on the Internet and find an example of an individual who has experienced post-traumatic growth. Summarize their story and indicate how they demonstrate growth in at least two of the areas on the *Post-traumatic Growth Inventory*.

Sources:

American Psychological Association – Monitor on Psychology
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma>

Bonanno G.A.
<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/bonanno>

National Institute of Mental Health website
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

Post-traumatic Growth Research Group
<https://ptgi.uncc.edu/ptg-research-group/>

Rendon. (2015). Upside: The new science of Post-Traumatic Growth. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Tedeschi, R. G., Shakespeare-Finch, J., Taku, K., & Calhoun, L.G. (2018). Posttraumatic growth: Theory, research, and applications. New York: Routledge.

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