Open Your Class With This Tomorrow- *Upside* **KEY**

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 relatively 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 up possibilities that were not previously present.
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 shift in one's belief system.
5. Some people experience post-traumatic growth as a greater appreciation for life in general.

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

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

The researchers in this field 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.

The researchers in this area stress that they hope you never face a significant 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 Growth Inventory Evaluation

Listed below are 21 areas that are sometimes used to measure positive change after traumatic events, as identified 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 shortened inventory and indicate which of the five areas 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

Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory

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

Part II: Post-Traumatic Growth Discussion

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

Biological factors: These include how the brain and body respond to stress. For example, some individuals may possess stronger coping abilities due to their unique brain chemistry or genetics. Hormones like cortisol or neurotransmitters like serotonin can affect how a person handles trauma and recovers over time. The brain may rewire itself, or exhibit brain plasticity, to help individuals cope with challenging experiences more positively.

- Genetic predisposition
- Higher levels of the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA

Psychological factors: These include a person's mindset (e.g., a growth mindset), personality, and coping strategies. Someone who is optimistic, open to learning, or able to reflect on their experience is more likely to grow from it. Using healthy coping strategies like journaling, therapy, or setting new goals can help people make sense of the trauma and become stronger.

- Constructive coping skills
- High self-efficacy
- Internal locus of control – The ability to rebuild a sense of control after a traumatic event in which a person was powerless by taking available positive actions and altering their beliefs about a situation.
- Optimistic explanatory style
- Effective emotional regulation
- Brutally honest optimism – Individuals who can find hope when feeling helpless and out of control, yet maintain an honest acceptance of the reality they face because of their crisis.
- Openness to Experience and Extroversion: These personality traits increase the likelihood of experiencing Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). More open individuals are more likely to reconsider their belief systems, which can increase the likelihood of PTG. Individuals high in the train of extroversion are more likely to actively respond to trauma and seek out connections with others, which are both related to PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun).
- Gratitude
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy – Trauma-informed therapy

Social factors: Having strong relationships and support from others can significantly impact one's well-being. Talking with friends, family, or a support group can help a person feel less isolated and provide them with new perspectives and insights. Positive social support can lead to closer relationships and a feeling of greater connection, which are key components of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG).

- Strong social support networks
- Community involvement
- Financial resources

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 specifically how they demonstrate growth in at least two of the areas on the *Post-traumatic Growth Inventory.*

Answers will vary, but some examples might include:

Roy Tuscany - High-Five Foundation
https://www.good.is/sports/high-five-foundation

Former Senator Max Cleland
https://www.historynet.com/heart-of-a-patriot-max-cleland-interview-on-surviving-vietnam.htm

United States Senator Tammy Duckworth
https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/news/in-the-news/senator-tammy-duckworth-on-the-attack-that-took-her-legsand-having-a-baby-at-50

Norwegian professional skier Karina Hillekim
https://www.karinahollekim.com/

Matt Cotcher
https://www.masskickers.org/matt-cotcher/

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.