

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Formulation

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common reaction to traumatic events. If you struggle with PTSD, you might experience distressing memories, intense emotions (e.g., fear or guilt), and you might avoid things that remind you of what happened. Crucially, you may feel like you're still under threat, even though the traumatic event is over.

Several things contribute to PTSD, including:

- Memories of your trauma which might be 'unprocessed', and which can intrude as flashbacks and nightmares.
- The sense you make of your experiences (at the time and afterwards), which can keep you in a state of heightened anxiety.
- The things you do to cope with the symptoms of PTSD, which can inadvertently keep them going.

One way of making sense of *your* experience is to explore how these 'common ingredients' of PTSD apply to you. Therapists use tools called *formulations* to create a 'map' of how a problem might have started and why it might be 'stuck'. By working through one with a therapist, you can reach a shared understanding of what is going on, and come up with ideas about how to get 'unstuck'.



## How could this tool help me?

You can use the *PTSD Formulation* to:

- Develop an understanding of your difficulties with your therapist, based on what psychologists know about PTSD.
- Guide the treatment strategies that will help you recover from PTSD.



## How should I use it?

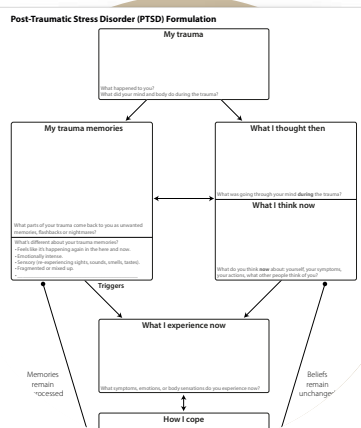
Each box will prompt you to record different parts of your experience:

- **My trauma.** Describe what happened in just a few words.
- **My trauma memories.** What parts of the trauma come back to you as unwanted memories, flashbacks, or nightmares?
- **What I thought then.** What was going through your mind *during* the trauma?
- **What I think now.** What do you think *now* about the trauma, yourself, your symptoms, and what other people think of you?
- **Triggers.** What things trigger unwanted memories for you?
- **What I experience now.** What symptoms do you currently experience when you encounter a trigger (e.g., distressing emotions or bodily sensations)?
- **How I cope.** What do you do to manage when you encounter a trigger?

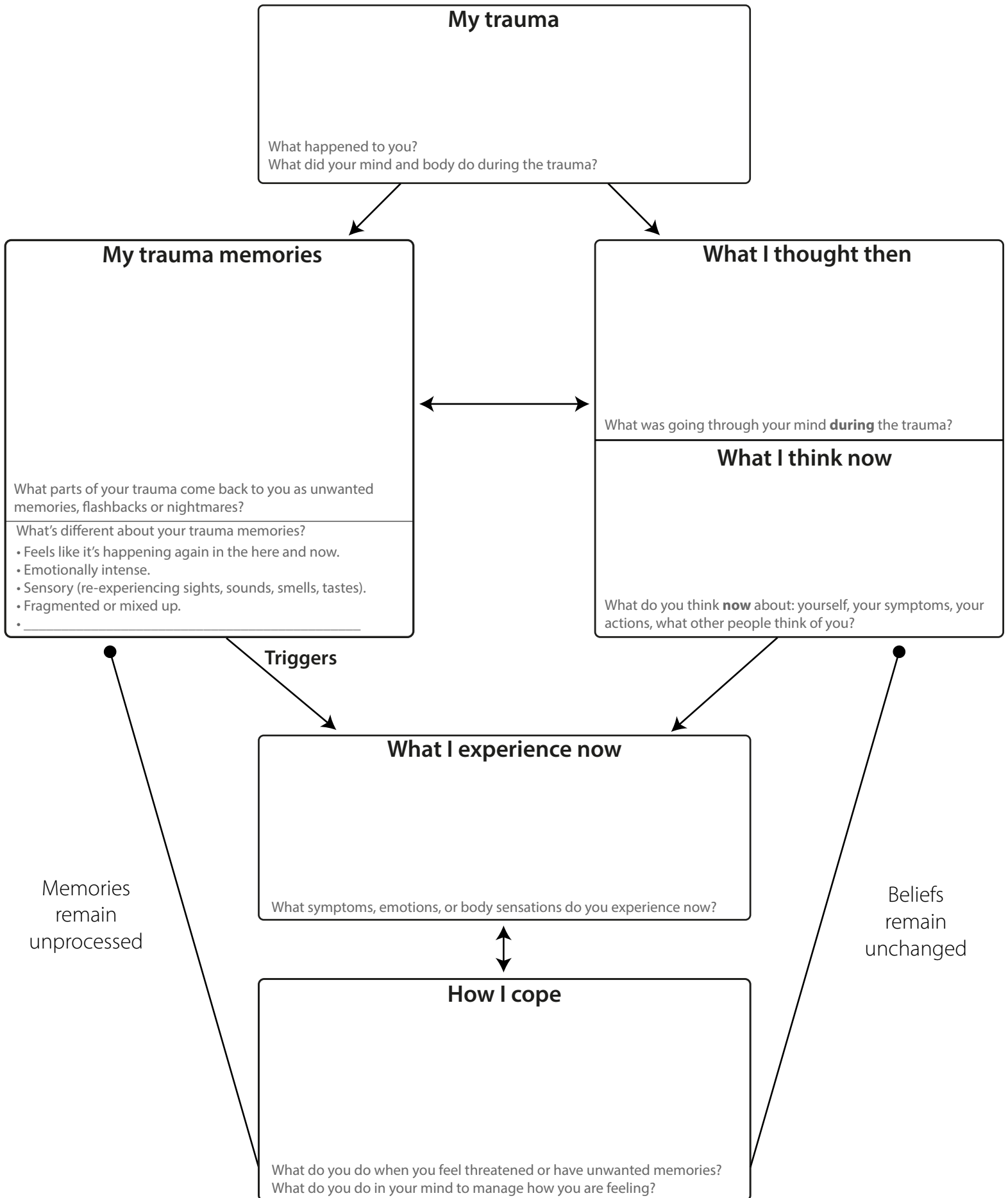


## Helpful tips

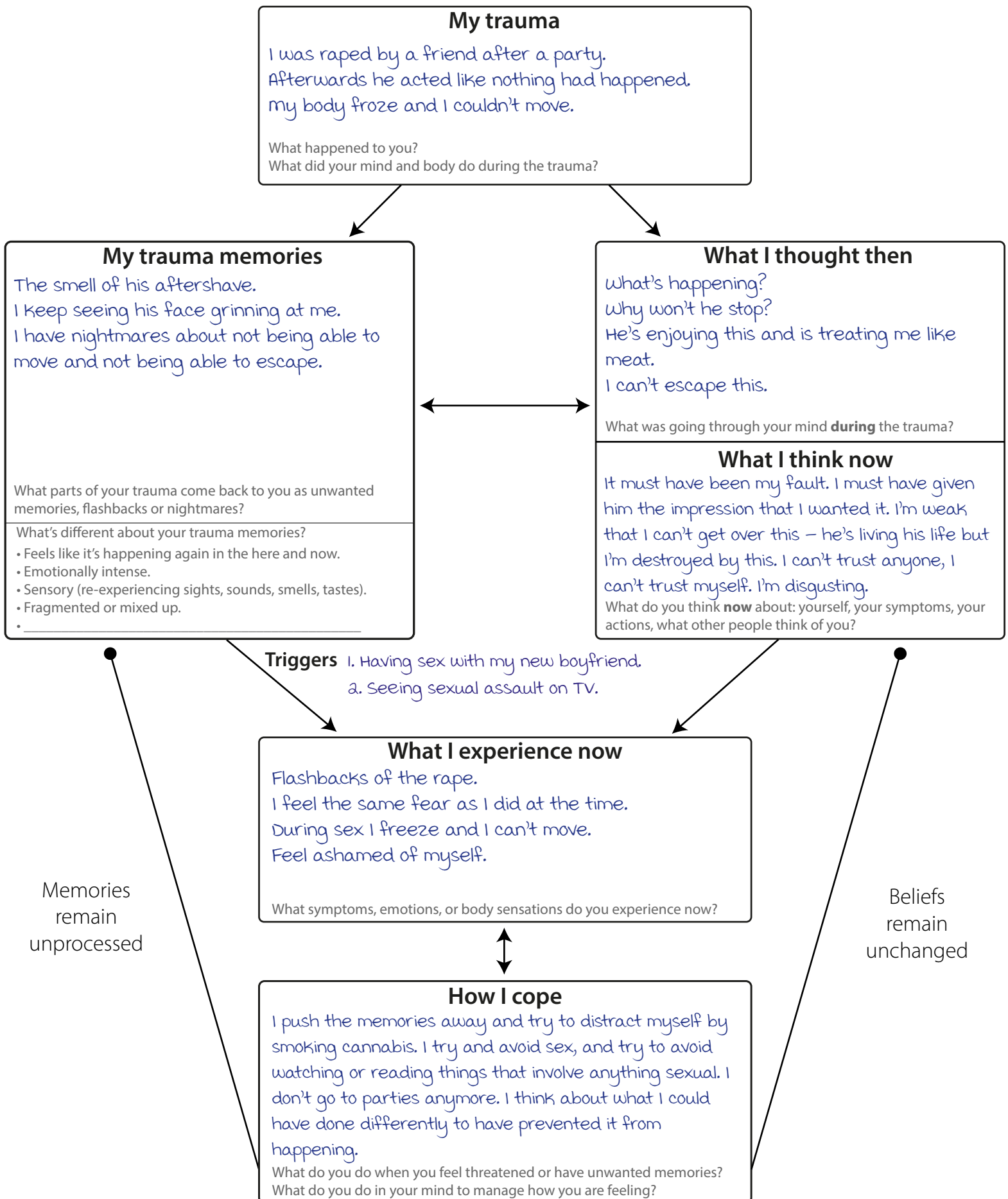
- If possible, complete this form in session with the guidance of your therapist.
- Completing the form might bring up difficult thoughts and feelings about what happened. Consider using grounding strategies to manage triggers.
- If it seems helpful, share your formulation with someone you trust. It may help them understand your difficulties better, and they might have important things to add.



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