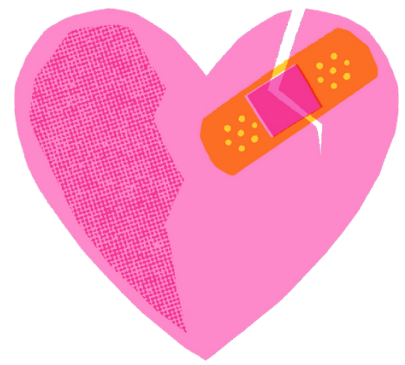




Eating disorders & intergenerational trauma

A resource for recovery

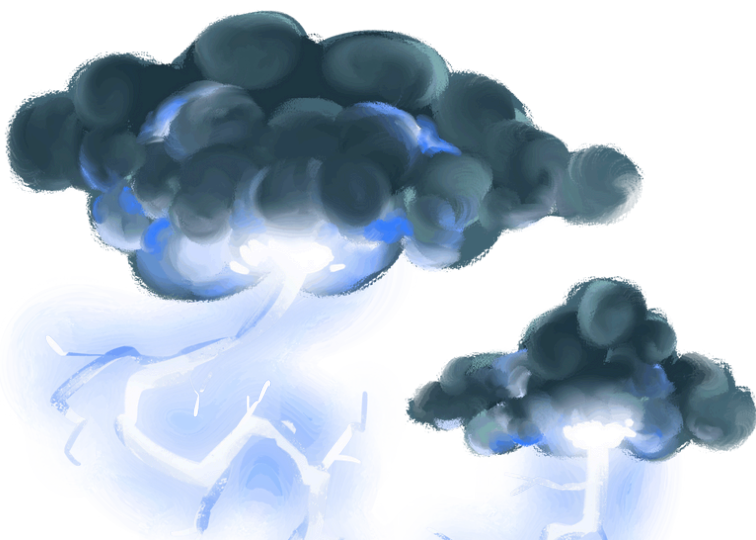


What is trauma?

Trauma can be described as starting with an event or an experience that overwhelms our capacity to cope, and then the feelings we then have as a result of that.

What makes something traumatic isn't just the event itself but how we interpret it and carry it forward in our lives.

Trauma often lives in our bodies and minds, affecting how we relate to the world, ourselves, and others.



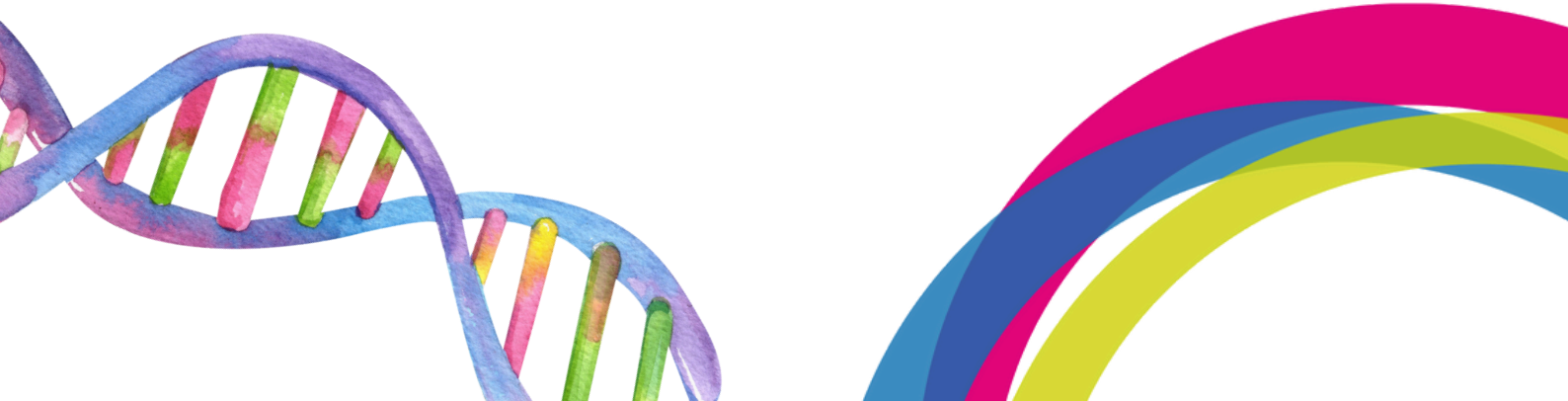


What is intergenerational trauma?

Intergenerational trauma, then, is trauma that is passed down to us from previous generations: our caregivers and their caregivers before them.

Trauma can impact families through large-scale historical events like war, genocide, or colonisation. But intergenerational trauma also applies to more personal family dynamics such as unresolved emotional pain, abuse, or neglect.

Often, it's the unspoken pain, what's not acknowledged or processed, that gets passed down through our family.





What's the link between IG trauma and eating disorders?

When trauma is handed down from our family, it can be a bit like we are handed one piece of a puzzle without the whole picture. Sometimes this is described as a 'nameless dread' – feelings of fear and confusion that are difficult to pin down or articulate.

An eating disorder might develop as a way to cope with emotions that can't be processed or expressed. Often, eating disorders are a way of managing pain that feels too overwhelming to bear.

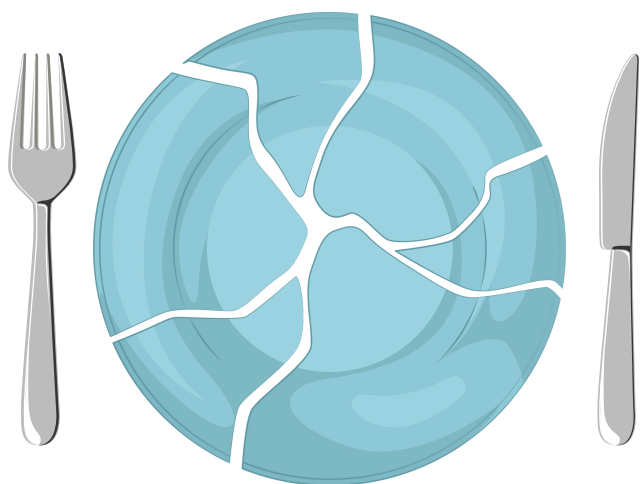




What's the link between IG trauma and eating disorders?

Children internalise what they see and learn from their family — this includes how food is treated, the language around it, and how emotions are dealt with.

So we might also unconsciously inherit harmful attitudes to food and body image from our family. Or we might learn to use food or restriction as a coping mechanism if we witness our parents doing the same.



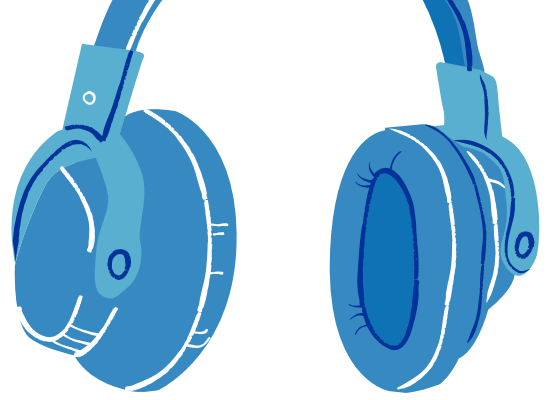


IG trauma and ED recovery

On the eating disorder recovery journey, it can be helpful to explore how trauma has been passed down through family lines and how it might impact your relationship with food, body image, and emotions.

Therapy is a space in which intergenerational trauma can be safely processed with support and curiosity. Asking questions like, “Why do I feel this way about food?” or “How did my family approach food and emotions?” can help uncover patterns that may have been inherited. Talking about inherited pain with a therapist provides a safe way to look at the underlying emotions that an eating disorder is providing a container for.





Online resources: listen & read



Dr. Manpreet Dhuffar-Pottiwal

Dr Dhuffar-Pottiwal has given a very informative TED talk on 'Understanding your intergenerational burdens and gifts' which explains how intergenerational trauma affects us.



Dr. Gabor Maté

Dr Gabor Maté teaches and writes on the impact of childhood experience and intergenerational on the body and mind.

