

Moral Injury

Understanding distress connected to actions, inaction, betrayal, or events that conflict with deeply held values.

What moral injury means

Moral injury is a term used for lasting distress after experiences that violate or seriously challenge a person's moral beliefs or expectations. It can involve guilt, shame, anger, betrayal, spiritual struggle, loss of trust, or feeling undeserving of connection.

How it differs from fear-based trauma

PTSD often includes fear, threat, avoidance, and re-experiencing. Moral injury may overlap with PTSD but can center more strongly on guilt, shame, betrayal, responsibility, or meaning.

Helpful directions

- Separate what you knew then from what you know now.
- Distinguish responsibility from total responsibility. High-stakes events usually involve context, constraints, systems, and incomplete information.
- Consider whether self-punishment is actually repairing anything.
- Identify values that remain important and actions that express them now.
- Seek trusted peer, clinical, spiritual, or community support when appropriate.

Try this reflection

What value feels injured or violated? What present-day action could honor that value without requiring you to erase the past?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.