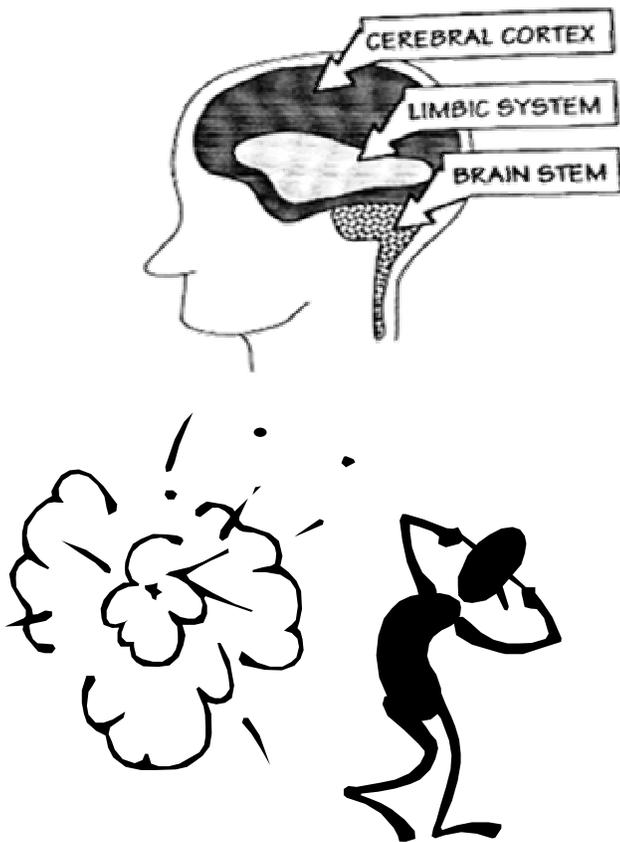


# The Brain(s), The Body, & Flashbacks



In our normal, daily life our rational brain (cerebral cortex) is largely in charge until something happens that sends us into the instinctual and/or emotional parts of the brain (the limbic system and brain stem). To get back into the rational brain, we *do* something to “pull ourselves together” so we can think clearly again and respond appropriately.

After a traumatic incident, the process is the same, only stronger, and “pulling ourselves together” may not be easy to do. Depending on how much attention is paid to trauma healing, the effects of the trauma may linger in unhealthy ways. (Link to Table of Common Responses). Or we may be doing all right until we bump up against something that is similar to what was present during the original event (a trigger). It could be a smell, the way someone touches us, hearing or seeing something that “triggers” the trauma memory, or a similar emotion or feeling (like loss of control or shame). Suddenly, the instinctual and emotional brain (limbic system and brain stem) take over. A lot of energy is present. It can feel like we are right back at the traumatic event again. This is called a flashback. Or we may just experience a sense of dis-ease, depression, or anxiety.

Flashbacks- are a common part of the reaction to trauma. They’re *a normal response to an abnormal situation* just as bleeding is a normal response to getting cut, or pain is a normal response to a broken leg. In fact, flashbacks are an indicator that your body is working properly to protect itself! By remembering what happened to you, the body is on alert, ready in case it ever happens again.

A key component of trauma is **loss of control**. Understanding what is happening and knowing some of the things you can do to help yourself will help you handle flashbacks. What can you do?

- \* Remember that you are having a common trauma reaction
- \* Let your body discharge the energy that comes with the reaction by going for a walk or doing other forms of exercise, deep breathing, allowing your body to shake, talking to someone safe, crying, dancing
- \* Ground yourself in the present by deliberately noting what you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel
- \* Pray, meditate, journal
- \* Notice what triggered the reaction so you know it didn’t just come out of the blue
- \* Seek help if the reactions persist beyond a month

Adapted from the work of Jim Norman, M.ED, C.T.S Oklahoma City, OK