

## Factsheet

# WHY AM I SO SENSITIVE OR ANGRY?



## 1 True or false

« Irritability? It's just moody, erratic, hysterical behaviour! » **Wrong!**

Post-traumatic irritability is involuntary, the irritable person is unhappy about it and suffers from it. It reflects anger and a state of hypervigilance linked to fear.

« Anger is a useless and dangerous emotion! » **Wrong!**

All emotions are useful, they transmit messages.

Anger teaches us about our values and our expectations of others.

Anger and violence are two distinct entities.

## 2 Understanding the Science

The nervous system is complex. It includes a subsystem known as the autonomic nervous system (ANS), or the vegetative system. This system includes an **accelerator pedal** to react to danger (= ANS sympathetic system) and a **brake pedal** to relax, slow down (= parasympathetic system). Regulation of this system is completely beyond our control.

In post-traumatic stress, this system is deregulated and remains in a state of alertness and fear. This manifests itself as hypervigilance, jumpy, some sleep disorders...

Emotions are raw (high emotional reactivity, irritability, anger):

traumatized people feel vulnerable, perceiving the world as unpredictable, malevolent and dangerous. They fear further trauma in a world that's become hostile. This emotional hyperreactivity manifests itself by irritability, hostility, angry outbursts, aggressiveness and difficulty concentrating.

## 3 My shrink tells me!

### Anger & co

Anger arises when you wish reality were different from what it is, when you resent someone, when an institution or object doesn't work as expected, etc. It's a knee-jerk reaction

and manifestations are often transitory: impatience, irritation, anger, even rage.

There's also a cold reaction, which lasts longer. This is the case with hatred and resentment, which may or may not be accompanied by a desire for revenge.

These latter feelings are toxic and destructive for you, and disrupt your relationships with others.

### Why are you so sensitive?

Experiencing trauma brings with it a fear of reliving it. You may feel frustrated at the injustice, restrained anger, and a state of being emotionally tense. This defensive attitude of vigilance puts your senses on the alert, so you don't let anything go by or suffer anything negative. Your demands on others and on the world increase, becoming more rigid. Resentment easily develops after a traumatic experience, not only against the aggressor, but also against those around you, and even against the whole world. You no longer recognize yourself!

### How can you make yourself calmer?

Emotional and vegetative hyper-reactivity are post-traumatic symptoms.

Treating the trauma can help them disappear. It doesn't have to be that way though! Understanding your emotions and thoughts is the key to calming down.