



# Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) Amid COVID-19 for Burn and Trauma Survivors

*Growing beyond post-traumatic stress and how this prepares us better to cope with today's crisis*

## *About the Author*

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James Bosch has spent the past decade working with children, individuals, couples and families. He knows that in the face of fear and wounding, we all struggle and feel alone. He became a therapist to accompany others on their journey back to wholeness. As a burn survivor, he brings a rich background and training in the healing from physical and emotional trauma.*

During these stressful times of this pandemic and sheltering-in-place, trauma and burn survivors can have their trauma systems reactivated by being isolated, anxious and afraid. Yet, the experience of surviving a traumatic event has actually prepared some trauma and burn survivors for this time and they are coping better because of it. Researchers call this experience **Post-Traumatic Growth**.

Claire Nana, LMFT wrote, "Post-traumatic growth can be defined as the positive psychological change that results from the attempt to find new meaning following a traumatic event. In this definition, it is not the event itself that causes the positive psychological change, but rather what eventually results from the shattering of a person's fundamental beliefs, values, self-perceptions and perspective of others and the world. It is the search to find new meaning, when old meanings no longer apply, that results in the transformation known as post-traumatic growth." In other words, **it is the transformation and lessons learned from healing from trauma that creates change and greater resiliency to face other challenges in life.**

Tedeschi and Calhoun grouped Post-Traumatic Growth into five domains. As you read these, it is recommended that you think about how your own growth in these areas are helping you cope with today's stress. Consider this a journaling exercise; list how you grew in or relate to each area from your past trauma(s) and see if you can apply these lessons to issues that are particularly hard for you today. This exercise can also highlight areas you need to get extra support for now.

- 1) **The opening of new possibilities not present before.** People's lives often take new, exciting and never dreamed of directions after a life-altering event (i.e. going back to school, new career, moving to places you never dreamed you would live, etc.). For example, a burn-injury may lead you to become a camp counselor at a burn camp, which may lead to a career in burn care, you may have not set out to pursue.
- 2) **A change in relationships with others.** This can be positive growth in relationships, building new and more meaningful relationships or moving away from relationships that are no longer fulfilling or mutually supportive.
- 3) **An increased sense of one's own personal strength.** The surviving of not only the burn injury, but the medical treatment, rehab and emotional healing related to a burn can give many burn survivors the sense that they can overcome any challenge no matter how hard.
- 4) **A greater appreciation for life in general.** Many burn survivors talk about having a new lease on life, a new perspective on what matters and their place in the grand scheme of the world.
- 5) **A deepening or significant change in one's spirituality.** A deep search for meaning once your world has turned upside down by trauma or a burn injury can lead to a greater sense of spirituality and deepened reliance on forces unseen to us before. This is not narrowed down to religion, but anyway you connect with an energy bigger than yourself.

**This world health crisis is another trauma to us as a collective and as individuals.** Not everyone is experiencing Post-Traumatic Growth at this time, as some people may be experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress due to this crisis. It is important to recognize where you are at in your recovery and what kind of support you need at this time. We all need to be willing to look at ourselves, share our feelings, use positive coping tools and most importantly, work together as a human community.

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