How does trauma therapy work?

Here is a brief excursion to the human brain and nervous system: During a traumatic event, various factors (triggers) are stored in a fear network: The memory of the dark, rain-soaked alley, the fast steps behind you, the smell of the damp asphalt, your racing heart and arising panic, and the thought: "I won't make it out of here in one piece." Unconscious details such as the harsh light of a streetlamp or the sounds of laughter coming from the distance are also absorbed by this network. If one of these triggers is activated in everyday life – by the sound of quick steps approaching from behind – a domino effect occurs: In a fast sequence, further parts of the network are activated and the same panic and helplessness arise – presumably out of nowhere! The logical consequence of such experiences is avoiding the triggers as much as possible; however, this leads to life becoming increasingly restricted and no new learning experiences are possible. Every dark street becomes dangerous, and any type of quick steps approaching from behind triggers the panic.

If therapy is not provided for a post-traumatic stress disorder, the fear network can continue to expand and integrate new triggers up to the point of a generalized anxiety disorder. At the same time, there is a strong danger of alcohol and medication abuse, as well as the development of a depression since the changed life after the trauma with all of its inexplicable symptoms is difficult to tolerate and arrange.

The number of traumas, the severity of the traumatic events, a stage of life in which the person was/is helpless (childhood or old age) and the lack of social support after the trauma increase the probability of developing a PTSD.

Trauma therapy works with the elements of the fear network. By relating and visualizing the traumatic occurrences within the safe framework, the triggers are activated. With the therapist's support, they are stored in such a way that they become part of the past and no longer trigger the panic. Such memories of the event, as well as unpleasant emotions, obviously continue to exist after the therapy. However, they do not lead to overwhelming feelings like panic, powerlessness, and horror. They no longer feel like the event is taking place right NOW.