Twitter Thread by MJ Leaver



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A lot of people are having trauma responses, and they don't even know it. Now trauma isn't a free pass to be an asshole, but one of the ways it can manifest is through 'over controlling'. They're scared, trying to push down that fear by attacking everyone around them.

> I am so confused by Aust Twitter over the past week. The tribalism, invective, mean spiritedness and fanaticism over the pandemic from normally stalwart people is abhorrent in its gruesome frenzy.
>
> — Amy Gray (@_AmyGray_) January 3, 2021

Now, trauma doesn't make you a racist, but being a racist does inflict trauma.
When you're triggered and vulnerable (and being vulnerable feels unsafe), this can lead to fear. In a desperate attempt to avoid that fear, and lack of control, people can try to control everything.

Someone disagrees with you and threatens what you're using to make sense of the universe? You attack, because it feels like an attack on you, and what you think is keeping you safe.

It doesn't mean there aren't things you should be critiquing, or that you can't have discussions, but it does mean you can and should be mindful of how your vulnerabilities are interacting with the ways you are trying to make sense of the world.

The good news is, the Government has funded 20 sessions of Medicare, so hopefully everyone can go to therapy and figure out a way to navigate a world that has changed forever.

Now some people are just behaving in character, they use the internet that way, with little regard for the person reading on the other side. They do "barrack" for a political team, and do have deeply held political beliefs that revolved around the oppression of others.

I am not talking about those people. I'm not talking about people who rail against systemic oppression, and white supremacy and saying they could fix it if they were nicer.

I'm talking about people who have been impacted in ways they may not have processed yet, by the pandemic, and who are acting against their character and their values, in particular some of the bile on the Australian twitter lately.

On the Australian twitter. Extra the, there, sorry. One day I will learn to proofread, but not today.

Just to clarify (because I worry about these things!) I'm not out here diagnosing people with PTSD. One, because I'm not a psych and two, experiencing trauma doesn't mean you're guaranteed to develop PTSD.
You can experience trauma, and have a trauma response, without having PTSD

I'm responding to a few DMs here too with these clarifications - yes there are also plenty of other trauma responses beyond what I have covered here.
If you are experiencing distress, and you do not feel safe, please refer to my pinned tweet thread for Australian helplines.

I know this is hard, and I am sorry. I don't know your exact circumstances. But please know that you matter, and your life is important. And things can get better (that doesn't mean it will always be easy), but there is a way through. So please, try to be kind to you.

Acknowledge your fear. Validate it. Try to talk to someone about it, if not a therapist, or a helpline, even a friend who has been through similar circumstances. Talking about the things you are feeling is an incredibly important step to processing those feelings.

If you find yourself acting in misplaced anger - pause. Take a breath. Step away from your phone, keyboard, or the person you're talking to. Take a breath. Take several. Try to ground yourself.

What are four things you can see? What are three things you can hear? What are two things you can physically feel? What is something you can smell?

Press your feet down into your shoes, or onto the ground. Focus on the physical sensation of your toes. If you can't do this, unclench your jaw, stretch your mouth open wide and close it again, repeat until you feel it relax.

Go into your bathroom, and run some cold water, let it trickle over your hands, splash some on your face. If it's possible, fill a sink and take a deep breath and sink your face in to it for a few moments. Put a cold flannel on your neck. Try to ground yourself physically.

Get some ice from the freezer, rub it on the back of your neck, or down your arms. These things can help your distress ease, especially if you try to focus your attention on the physical details.

If it works for you, you can try a breathing exercise, there's plenty of free apps out there that have them (I use Calm, which has both a free and a subscription service). Mindfulness does not fix anxiety or trauma, but it can give you space to make choices.

Noticing your emotions, even if you have no ide what to do with them, is a really good first step at regulating them. Anger, in this context, is primarily a secondary response, it might be driven by fear, or by shame, or both, for example.

Not all anger - there are plenty of things to be angry about- but the misdirected kind - when you're lashing out in interpersonal situations and you don't want to be.

Because here's the thing, coming from lived experience- a lot of trauma comes from being powerless to change the traumatic event, and it is then in turn reinforced, or retriggered in some cases, by feeling powerless about our external, and internal states.

You don't always have the capacity to change the external events. And I am not suggesting that you can just "think" yourself out of trauma, depression or anxiety, but what you can do, is learn strategies and skills to help you cope with these events.

That's what resilience is, and I don't mean the co-opted kind touted by bullies, abusers, and corporations, I mean the capacity to tolerate your own internal distress, and find ways to mitigate it to keep yourself safe.

Are you thinking you should see a therapist? I know not everyone has that option (either financially or accessibly), but, if you can, then try it. Google some, read about what they treat, what modalities (kinds of therapy tools) they use.

Think about who you are as a person and what you need, what is important to you.
So for me, is my therapist queer friendly? Are they body positive? Are they anti-racist? Are they trauma informed? Do they practice schema therapy (Yes, to all. I spent months looking).

ACT - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Mindfulness are really helpful.
DBT - Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (this one is useful if you experience regular rumination, emotional dysregulation, though it is not trauma informed on its own it has some useful skills).

You might find a great psychologist or counsellor right off the bat, or you might have to research. You can call, or you can make email enquiries with some. Or if you have a good GP you can ask them for a referral to one they know of. You can find your own, then get a referral.

When I switched psychologists, I had a short list of five I was checking out. Three had books that were full. One wasn't a good fit and the fifth turned to be awesome (and is my current). My biggest recommendation is first appointment you go hard, lay it all out there.

I know that can be scary, but here's the thing- you will know from their reaction and responses if they are a good fit. If they suck (I am sorry) then you can move on to your next choice (this is where a gentle query email or phone call can help, with an outline of what you want)

Okay, sorry, my anxiety made this very long and winding. I'm done now. ■