

# MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



## Book Review

### The End of Trauma:

How the New Science of Resilience is changing how we think about PTSD

*By George Bonanno, PhD*

As we commemorate the 20th anniversary of 9/11, many mental health researchers are beginning to provide answers to this question: How did the 911 attack affect the mental health of those living in NY and across the country?

A new book provides answers to that question as well as looking at how other major traumatic events have affected the survivors' mental health.

The book is titled The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience is Changing How We Think About PTSD by George Bonanno, a clinical psychologist at Columbia University. I highly recommend it to TIP leaders and volunteers.

Essentially the book uses the results of many research projects to debunk the myth that traumatic events cause long term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in a large number of those affected. The book's message: The vast majority of PTSD) those affected by a traumatic event will almost always show a clear resiliency pattern beginning relatively soon after the traumatic event. It's time to shift our focus from what we expect to go wrong to what actually goes right.

This is good news, and for many trauma professions and citizens in our society it's quite surprising. Here are key points from the book:

- Within 6 months of the 911 attack, there was a rapid resolution of PTSD symptoms among survivors.
- According to renowned PTSD researcher Patricia Resick *"People's expectations about the impact of the 911 attack on the country's mental health were wrong. Millions of dollars earmarked for mental health treatment went unused. Strong emotions do not equate to psychopathology."*
- Most people who experience highly adverse events do not develop trauma related disorders. They show a clear resiliency pattern beginning relatively soon after the event.
- At the beginning of the covid pandemic, news stories warned of a historic wave of mental health problems. In fact, a few months after the beginning of the pandemic, rates of mental health problems fell to almost normal levels. Suicide rates actually decreased during the pandemic.

These “good news” findings will come as a surprise to many in the general public who believe that many more people are adversely affected over the long term by traumatic events than actually are. That’s understandable. After all, the media descends on these traumatic events in the immediate aftermath. They interview survivors whose lives have been shattered. Then they leave. The follow-up that they do months later is usually with the few who are suffering from PTSD and not with the vast majority of those quietly healing and getting on with their lives.

This lack of understanding by the general public about the effects of trauma on mental health has real world consequences. Those who are traumatized don’t know that their intense feelings following a traumatic event are most likely transitory and that they will return to normal relatively quickly. This lack of understanding compounds the suffering of trauma survivors. Not only do they suffer from the traumatic event, they suffer from the hopeless feeling that their suffering will be permanent... “I hurt and I will hurt forever.”

What are the implications for the TIP organization of this good news about human resilience after trauma?

First, we should appreciate our role in contributing to the resilience of survivors. Healing does not occur in a vacuum. The immediate support our volunteers provide survivors is a major contributing factor to their resilience.

Second, we need to incorporate this “good news” about resiliency into our community presentations and whenever we talk about TIP (training, community presentations, media interviews...). Our message should be... “Traumatic events are painful and can cause anxiety and depression initially. But the good news is that it’s very common for these intense feelings to diminish and for survivors to get back to their normal lives.”

TIP Affiliates are trusted trauma organizations in their respective communities. Who better to deliver the latest hopeful and empowering information about recovering from trauma?