



# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

*Provided through the Marketing and Development Committee  
of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas*

## WHAT IS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?



Living through a frightening or disturbing experience can cause people to develop a medical condition called post-traumatic stress (PTSD). It's an emotional and psychological reaction to this painful, shocking trauma. Some things that may lead to PTSD include violent crime like rape or assault, military combat, accidents, and natural disasters. Anyone can develop PTSD; men,

women and children of all ages can be affected. Trauma can have a lasting effect as many survivors feel their lives have changed. What once seemed a safe and good world may suddenly seem dangerous and unpredictable.

## SYMPTOMS OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

- **Re-experiencing the Trauma** - recurrent memories of flashbacks - often survivors can't stop reliving the trauma in their mind, or predict when such memories will return. Nightmares - people with PTSD may recall the trauma nightly in their sleep.
- **Physical Symptoms** - headaches, dizziness, nausea, stomach pain, chest pain, immune system problems - many survivors don't realize these may be related to PTSD.
- **Anxiety Symptoms** (hyperarousal symptoms)- insomnia - fear of nightmares can make sleeping difficult for people with PTSD. Irritability or outbursts of anger, feelings of mistrust or guilt. Difficulty concentrating. Jumpiness - some survivors become unable to relax; they're constantly "on guard" and try to avoid situations that remind them of the trauma.

## SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

- Reliving the event through repetitive play.
- Tantrums.
- Separation anxiety.
- Thumb sucking or bed-wetting.

## DIAGNOSING PTSD

To be diagnosed with PTSD, a person must have all of the following for at least 1 month:

- At least one re-experiencing symptom.
- At least three avoidance symptoms.
- At least two hyperarousal symptoms.
- Symptoms that make it hard to go about daily life, go to school or work, be with friends, and take care of important tasks.



PTSD can affect anyone - military personnel, civilians, emergency responders, victims and witnesses.

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## RECOVERY TAKES TIME

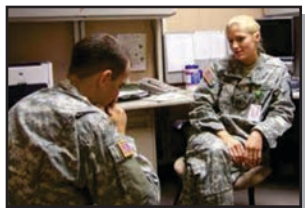
Survivors may go through various stages as they heal. Some may not be able to talk about their problems because of guilt and shame. Often, survivors feel they did or said something to deserve the attack. Many feel they must remain silent to protect their loved ones. Some may feel shame because they lost control over their lives during the traumatic event.

Acknowledging one's feelings is the first step in recovery. People with PTSD must recognize that the event is still affecting them. Survivors need to learn to face what happened to them and overcome their fears or anxieties about it. Eventually, most survivors accept the changes in their lives caused by trauma and feel stronger than ever before.

PTSD can be treated and is tailored for the individual. Treatment may include individual therapy by resolving their problems with the help of a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health specialist. Family therapy is where all members of the family work together toward recovery. Group therapy is survivors meet with others who have experienced similar trauma. Drug therapy is where medication is used to treat the PTSD symptoms under medical supervision. Remember to never use alcohol or illegal drugs to try to ease the symptoms.



## TIPS TO HELP EASE PTSD



- **Talk about the experience** - vent your feelings instead of keeping them bottled up.
- **Relax** - do something you enjoy everyday, avoid major sources of stress if you can, avoid watching too much TV as broadcasts of traumatic events are often shown repeatedly.
- **Eat right** - emotional stress puts extra demands on your physical health so a balanced diet is a must.
- **Develop inner peace** - joining or returning to a religious group can be a positive force in your life.
- **Exercise** - helps relieve stress
- **Stay involved** - spend time with people and do things for others.

Survivors need to understand they're not to blame for what happened to them.

## MORE INFORMATION



*Mental Health Matters*

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