

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Trauma is the result of extraordinary stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless and vulnerable in a world that seems dangerous. If you've gone through a traumatic experience, you may be struggling with painful emotions, frightening memories or a sense of constant danger. You may also feel numb, disconnected and unable to trust other people. Trauma can affect those who experience the catastrophe, those who witness it, and those who pick up the pieces afterward including emergency workers and law enforcement officers.

The types of events that cause trauma are numerous. Emotional trauma can be caused by a one time experience or by experiences of ongoing and relentless stress. Examples include war, crime, terrorist attacks, rape, house fires, floods, hurricanes, car or plane crash, sexual or physical abuse, medical procedures, or life threatening illnesses. Following a traumatic event, most people experience a variety of emotions including shock, fear, and anger. Often, they can think or talk of little else other than what happened. Others may feel jumpy, detached, or depressed. These reactions are a normal response to an abnormal event and have nothing to do with personal weakness. A person's reaction may last several days or even months. Most people will recover naturally over time with the aide and support of family and friends.

With post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), however, you remain in psychological shock and the symptoms don't decrease. A person suffering from PTSD will re-experience the event through upsetting memories, flashbacks, and nightmares. They will tend to avoid places, activities, thoughts, or feelings that remind them of the trauma or may not be able to recall important aspects of the trauma. They may have difficulties sleeping, increased anger and irritability, poor concentration, and be on constant alert. Other symptoms may include guilt, self-blame, depression, suicidal thoughts, feeling alienated, feelings of mistrust, and substance abuse. Left unresolved, the symptoms will only worsen and will ultimately harm relationships, the ability to function, and the quality of a person's life. It is recommended that a person suffering from PTSD seek guidance and support from an experienced therapist or doctor. The treatment process is gradual and ongoing. Symptoms are relieved by helping a person deal with the traumatic experience.

While professional treatment may decrease a person's level of anxiety and fear, the following self-help tips may assist a person in coping day to day.

- Reach out to others for support. The temptation may be to withdraw from life and people. It is important to stay connected to those who care about you.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol may make a person temporarily feel better but using them may only worsen the symptoms of PTSD, interfere with treatment, and add problems at home and in personal relationships.
- Challenge your sense of helplessness. It is important to remind yourself that you have strengths and coping skills that can get you through tough times.

The memory of a traumatic experience may never disappear, but treatment can help to restore a person's sense of control and reduce the powerful hold the memory of the trauma has on their life.