

# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

# TRAUMA

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# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

## What is trauma?

Any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and afraid for your life or safety is traumatic. Traumatic experiences shatter expectations of safety and controllability, and hurt us emotionally. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to feel traumatised.

## Causes of Trauma

Causes can be natural or man-made and can be a one time event or be ongoing



- ☐ Constant witnessing of crime, violence, abuse
- ☐ Accident - car, work, home
- ☐ Hijacking, Smash & Grab
- ☐ House robbery, mugging
- ☐ Domestic Violence
- ☐ Bullying
- ☐ Life-threatening illness
- ☐ Death of a loved one
- ☐ Breakup of a significant relationship
- ☐ Natural disasters

## A child's sense of security

Anything that disrupts a child's sense of security can cause serious traumatic reactions and can result in PTSD later in life. Even though adults work hard to keep children safe, dangerous events still happen. This danger can come from outside of the family (such as a natural disaster, car accident, school shooting, or community violence) or from within the family, such as domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse, or the unexpected death of a loved one.

## Feelings after a Traumatic event

Some of the symptoms that people can feel after a Traumatic event include:

- ☐ Change in appetite
- ☐ Anxiety / fear
- ☐ Nightmares
- ☐ Sleeping difficulties
- ☐ Feeling irritable, agitated or angry
- ☐ Very aware and ready to act
- ☐ No energy, feeling tired all the time
- ☐ Feeling Depressed, sad or crying often
- ☐ Avoiding people, places and things that remind you of the event
- ☐ Not being able to concentrate on work or normal everyday activities
- ☐ Feeling worried about the safety of the people that you love



For most people, these symptoms get less and go away after a couple of weeks. However, if they continue for 6 weeks or longer, it may be PTSD.

## Reasons for feelings of self-blame

People who go through trauma sometimes feel as if they are to be blamed. This can cause very strong feelings of shame or guilt, even though it wasn't their fault.

1. Self-blame can be one way your mind tries to make sense of what has happened, and to avoid overwhelming feelings of anger, grief or betrayal.
2. You can have feelings of dying or something differently at the time, even though you couldn't have.
3. You are made to feel responsible for someone else's actions, even though they had power over you.

Even though self-blame can be very hard to cope with, it can be a way your mind tries to protect you, so it might take time and support to be able to start feeling differently. You might feel confused or overwhelmed if someone else says it wasn't your fault, although hearing this can also be a relief.

# SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENTS

## Symptoms Of Trauma

There are 3 basic symptom clusters that are common after a trauma. Usually these feelings and reactions ease over time but with PTSD, they continue for months, or even years.

### 1. Intense Memories

These are times when memories of the trauma 'take over' and the person re-experiences the event:



- ☐ Constant thoughts or memories of the trauma
- ☐ Flashbacks while awake
- ☐ Distressing dreams and nightmares
- ☐ Feeling like you have no control over memories of the trauma

### 2. Fear Symptoms



After a trauma, you could experience feelings of uneasiness and that you are still in danger.

- ☐ Startled or scared by loud noises and sudden movements
- ☐ Feeling nervous and jumpy
- ☐ Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- ☐ Irritability or outbursts of anger
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Hyper-vigilance being very aware of things around you

### 3. Avoidance Symptoms

Trauma survivors often stay away from people, places or things that remind them of the incident. Over time this avoidance can severely affect daily life. It also negatively affects a survivor's relationships with family, friends and colleagues

- ☐ Avoiding people, places or things that remind you of the event
- ☐ Not talking about how you feel or what happened
- ☐ Feeling disconnected from other people
- ☐ Self-medication: drugs, alcohol, smoking

## When to see a doctor

If you have disturbing thoughts and feelings about a traumatic event for more than a month, if they're severe, or if you feel you're having trouble getting your life back under control, talk to your doctor or a Mental Health professional. Getting treatment as soon as possible can help prevent PTSD symptoms from getting worse.

## Treatment

Having lived through a trauma stresses both the mind and body. A person who has gone through a trauma cannot expect to behave and act as they normally do straight after the trauma. It is important to be gentle on yourself and give yourself time to get better.



## Debriefing

Short-term counselling (1 or 2 sessions) with in a week after the traumatic event. The counsellor or de-briefer will take you through what happened and how you felt.

## Trauma Counselling

Trauma therapy aims to empower survivors and helps them regain a sense of security, safety, trust and self-worth.

## Medication

If symptoms persist and are negatively impacting your daily life and functioning, it is very important to see your GP for a full assessment and possible medication.



# Self-Help For Trauma

Trauma disrupts your body's natural balance and survivors of trauma become 'frozen' in a state of hyper-arousal and fear. Remember that the symptoms you are experiencing are part of the trauma process - give yourself time to heal.



## Healing from trauma is a process:

- ❑ It is natural to want to run away or hide from what happened. It's important not to make any big decisions after a traumatic event like quitting your job or moving house.
- ❑ Take back the control in your life by getting back to your normal habits and routines sooner rather than later.
- ❑ Talk about your experience in detail - what happened, when it happened, how you felt, what you saw, what you felt, what you feared.
- ❑ If possible, talk to your family & friends. Allow them to give you support. Remember they may also be struggling with what you have been through & may know how to help you.
- ❑ Take one day at a time - there will be good days and days that are more challenging. Be mindful of how you are feeling and what you are thinking.
- ❑ Start moving - hum, sing, do some exercise and dance. It helps your body to relax and your mind to feel less threatened.
- ❑ Connect with the world around you: talk to someone, play with a child, pet an animal, walk barefoot, or write out how you feel in a journal or notebook.

## SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WITH PTSD



Encourage your loved one to seek treatment



Encourage them to share openly



Ask how you can help them feel better



Learn to identify, predict and manage triggers



## REACH OUT TO US FOR SUPPORT



[www.sadag.org](http://www.sadag.org)



24hr helpline 0800-567-567