

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder of recovery from traumatic experiences. An event is considered to be a traumatic event when life was threatened or lost and during which the person felt horrified and/or helpless. Trauma can shatter the way someone sees him/herself, the world and other people. PTSD is seen as an anxiety disorder.

Common Symptoms:

- Flashbacks (reliving the event)
- Avoiding talking about the event(s)
- Nightmares (also can include recurring dreams)
- Easily startled (loud noises, fireworks, helicopters, etc.)
- Lack of interest in activities
- Problems with sleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Hypervigilance (very cautious, extreme awareness, etc.)
- Emotional numbing

How PTSD Can Affect Families:

- Feel emotionally distant from your loved one
- Lack of communication with your loved one
- Loved one may not want to participate in family social activities
- Decreased sexual activity
- Loved one may become preoccupied with keeping family safe
- Feel anger towards loved one
- Feel hurt by loved one
- Feel helpless that you cannot help loved one overcome their trauma
- Feel discouraged that your loved one cannot overcome the effects of their trauma
- Feel rejected by loved one

Treatment for PTSD while at Shepherd Center

- Intensive Individual psychotherapy – 2-3 times per week
- Group therapy – Emotional Regulation Skills, PTSD group
- Potential topics to be addressed:
 - Trigger Awareness
 - Grounding techniques
 - Relaxation skills (diaphragmatic breathing, mindfulness meditation)
 - Sleep hygiene
 - Healthy vs Unhealthy Coping Strategies
 - Processing traumatic experiences
 - Honoring those you have lost
- Medication

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PTSD - Family Tips

How You Can Help Someone Heal From Trauma

1. Take good care of yourself. It is so common to put all your energy into helping your loved one (and children) and forget about self-care! Make sure you are sleeping, eating right and exercising. Consider doing something to re-charge you! Spend time with a friend, join a support group, take a hot bath. If you are having trouble eating or sleeping, consider talking to a doctor or therapist.
2. Maintain a routine for you and your family.
3. Learn as much as you can about PTSD. Communicate to identify (with your loved one) potential triggers (e.g., helicopters, war movies, thunderstorms) and anniversary dates of painful memories.
4. Respect your loved one's space and limits. Understand that his/her emotional withdrawal and irritability may be part of PTSD – and not you or your relationship.
5. Encourage safer outings (i.e. quiet dinner with friends, low key places, parks). Start during non-peak hours for short periods of time, and then gradually build as outings get easier.
6. If your loved one is having flashback, gently remind them of where they are and what is going on. Avoid "shaking them out of it." Suggest grounding strategies, such as a cold pack or deep slow breathing with eyes open to remain in the current moment.
7. Encourage healthy coping strategies, but avoid trying to be his/her therapist. These strategies include exercise, leisure, game time, deep breathing, positive self-talk, SWOPS, soothing music, watching a funny movie. Offer to do the activities with your loved one.
8. Do not pressure your loved one to talk about the traumatic experiences or what they are working on in therapy. Let them decide when and how much to share. Then listen without judgment. It is normal for survivors to want to share with other survivors or a therapist before sharing with family. They may fear sharing details about the events because they are afraid of judgment or being seen differently by you.
9. Do not "sneak up" behind your loved one. Give them a heads up first.
10. Do not tolerate abuse of any kind – financial, emotional, physical or sexual. Although someone may try to "blame" their wrongdoing on PTSD, it is not OK to rationalize harmful behavior. Trauma survivors are still responsible for their behavior.

If help is needed, find a couple's counselor or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline for support at: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Always take any comments about suicide seriously and seek professional help immediately. Call 911 if someone is in immediate danger. Crisis hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Adapted from Trust after Trauma: A Guide for Relationships for Survivors and Those Who Love Them by A. Matsakis (1998).

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PTSD - Self Care Tips

1. Learn more about recovery from trauma and PTSD. If you're reading this, it's a great first step!
2. Maintain a daily routine that includes relaxation and leisure.
3. Practice good self-care strategies, which include good sleep hygiene, regular exercise, and eating well. Physical fitness is crucial to mental fitness.
4. Use grounding exercises to stay in the present moment when you have a flashback. It is normal for the mind to connect daily events with past traumatic experiences. It is the mind's way of trying to protect you from danger. However, when you are no longer in a warzone or traumatic situation, the mind may continue to have "false alarms" for danger. Grounding strategies help your physical body connect to the current situation, to reduce feeling as though you are experiencing the traumatic event again. Strategies include planting your feet firmly on the ground, repeating to yourself where you are, splashing cool water or holding ice, and using soothing scents.
5. Learn strategies for helping your body relax. Being in constant fight-or-flight - "go mode" - is exhausting and can lead to health problems down the road. Fortunately, you can learn to train your body's parasympathetic nervous system. This system is responsible for returning the body to a resting state after stress. Strategies for relaxation may include visual imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, and diaphragmatic or deep, slow breathing. Exercise in moderation is also crucial.
6. Spend time with family and friends who are supportive. Avoid isolating, which can often worsen PTSD symptoms.
7. Communicate with loved ones about potential triggers so they can help you manage these triggers. Talk to them about how they can help when you experience stress.
8. Take medications as prescribed. Avoid substances and non-prescribed medications. Not only can they interact with your medications, but many substances, including alcohol can interfere with recovery.
9. Join a support group. Seek treatment.
10. Do something kind for someone every day. Practicing compassion towards others can help someone learn to have compassion for him or herself during the recovery process. Healing takes time.