



Make Prevention a CHOICE

Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

At least 50% of all adults and children are exposed to a psychologically traumatic event each year and as many as 67% of trauma survivor's experience lasting psychosocial impairment such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD develops in individuals who have experienced an emotionally or physically traumatic event. This event is considered more disturbing than what we tend to think of as an unpleasant experience. Traumatic stress reactions are normal responses to abnormal events. The most frequently experienced traumas include:

- Witnessing someone being badly injured or killed
- Being involved in a fire, flood, or natural disaster
- Being involved in a life-threatening accident
- Combat exposure
- Physical/Sexual abuse or assault
- Repetitive routine activities

Most people experience post-traumatic stress reactions for days or even weeks after the trauma. However, for some, the effects may continue for months. Usually these reactions become less severe over time, but in some cases may persist and psychologically handicap a person.

Signs of PTSD:

- Re-experiencing the trauma of the event through dreams or flashbacks
- Recurrent recollections of a disturbing event; i.e. (images, thoughts, perceptions)
- Feeling of emotional numbness and detachment from others
- Irritability or exaggerated shock responses
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety or anger
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, and/or making decisions
- Physiological responses to situations or events that symbolize or resemble the original stressful event or situation

PTSD and The Family:

The family is profoundly affected when any member experiences psychological trauma and suffers PTSD. Some traumas are directly experienced by only one family member, but other family members may experience

shock, fear, anger, and pain in their own unique ways simply because they care about and are connected to the survivor.

PTSD will not automatically develop in friends and/or family members regardless of their physical or emotional proximity, but they may feel the affect of the disorder experienced by the survivor in several ways:

- Family members may feel hurt, alienated, frustrated, or discouraged and may have a tendency to feel angry or distant toward the survivor.
- Even if the traumatic event occurred many years ago, survivors may act...and family members may feel...as if the trauma never stops happening. This can cause family members to avoid activities or people and become isolated.
- They may find it difficult to discuss personal or family problems, because the survivor either becomes controlling, overprotective, or unreasonably anxious and fearful about problems becoming terrible catastrophes.
- Family members may find their sleep is disrupted by the survivor's sleep problems.
- Alcohol and other drugs may be used by the survivor and could expose family members to emotional, financial, and even domestic violence problems.

Steps in Managing PTSD:

Step One is to recognize the signs of post-traumatic stress.

- Individuals who have experienced traumatic situations often have repeated flashbacks of the event.
- The shock of trauma may also create "blanks" in memory because the mind is overwhelmed and needs a "time out."

Step Two is to identify current ways of coping with severe, traumatic stress.

- Trying to avoid people, places, or thoughts that are reminders of the event.
- Shutting off feelings or connection to other people that are reminders of the event.
- Being hypervigilant or on-guard against the onset of a PTSD episode.

Step Three is to get help from one of several special services for individuals (and their families) who are coping with PTSD.

- Family Service or Support Centers
- Chaplain
- Support Groups
- Mental Health Professionals
- Local VA Hospital

Trauma memories cannot be erased, but the stress that results from the event can be manageable.

How to Contact Us

Naval CBC Gulfport Center

Phone: (228) 871-2581/3000

Fax: (228) 871-3610/2384

Navy at Stennis Space Center

Phone: (228) 813-4070

Fax: (228) 688-5561

Toll Free: (800) 342-3525

Written by Value Options 1-800-700-8646