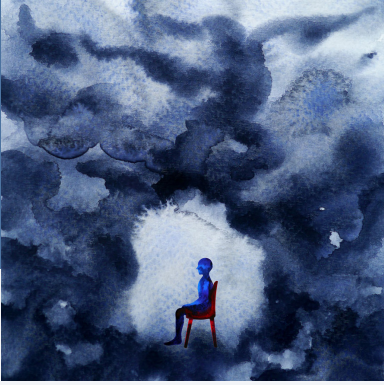


# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



## What causes PTSD?

What is traumatic for one person may not be for another. This is why people who experience the same event may have different reactions. Factors that increase risk for PTSD include:

- Living through dangerous events and traumas
- The sudden, unexpected death of a loved one
- Witnessing the suffering of another person or animal?
- Childhood trauma including neglect or abuse of any kind
- Getting hurt or experiencing serious illness
- Feeling horror, helplessness, or extreme fear
- Having little or no social support after a traumatic event
- Dealing with extra stress after the traumatic event, such as loss of a loved one, pain, injury, or loss of a job or home
- Having a history of mental illness or substance use

When things don't feel safe, or the safety of others is at risk, it is natural to feel fear. The human brain is built to protect us from danger and we learn from an early age about the people, places, and situations we can trust and those we should avoid. When our brains detect a threat, our bodies automatically begin a stress response that prepares us to "fight, flight, or freeze." While these responses may be helpful in the moment, they can be troublesome if they persist when the danger is no longer present.

## What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

Traumatic experiences that involve extreme fear, helplessness, and intense distress can make very deep impressions in the parts of our brain that sense and respond to fear. That means that after the trauma, we may be particularly sensitive to any reminder of the event. We may not even realize that our thoughts and behaviors are tied to the trauma. Post-traumatic stress is a term for the physical sensations, thoughts, behaviors, and feelings that are related to the trauma and can arise at any time. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs when these reactions are prolonged and interfere with daily activities, relationships, or quality of life. Not everyone with PTSD has been through a dangerous event. Some people develop PTSD after a friend or family member experiences danger, harm, or death. PTSD can happen to anyone at any age.

### FACT:

According to the National Center for PTSD, about **7** or **8** out of every **100** people will experience PTSD at some point in their lives.

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

## Healing & Recovery



There are several therapies that can treat PTSD and there is hope for recovery. A doctor or mental health professional who has expertise in PTSD can help with treatment options.

Some factors that may promote recovery after trauma include:

- Seeking out support from other people, such as friends and family
- Finding a support group after a traumatic event
- Learning to feel good about one's own actions in the face of danger
- Having a positive coping strategy, or a way of getting through the bad event and learning from it
- Being able to act and respond effectively despite feeling fear

## Signs and Symptoms of PTSD

It is important to see a health care professional to rule out other causes of PTSD symptoms. A doctor who has experience helping people with mental illnesses, such as a psychiatrist or psychologist, can diagnose PTSD. Signs and symptoms of PTSD include:

- Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating
- Bad dreams
- Scary thoughts
- Avoiding places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience
- Being easily startled
- Feeling tense or “on edge”
- Difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event
- Angry outbursts
- Difficulty remembering details of the traumatic event
- Negative thoughts about oneself or the world
- Distorted feelings like guilt or blame
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities

It is natural to have some of these symptoms for a few weeks after a dangerous event. When the symptoms last more than a month, seriously affect your ability to function, and are not due to substance use, medical illness, or anything except the event itself, they might be PTSD. Some people with PTSD don't show any symptoms for weeks, months, or years. PTSD is often accompanied by depression, substance abuse, or an anxiety disorder.

Get connected to free, 24/7 support from a trained counselor at the Maryland Helpline. Call **(2-1-1, press 1)**, text your zip code to **898-211**, or visit **211MD.org**.

