



# What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

Traumatic events—such as an accident, assault, military combat or natural disaster—can have lasting effects on a person’s mental health. While many people will have short term responses to life-threatening events, some will develop longer term symptoms that can lead to a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD symptoms often co-exist with other conditions such as substance use disorders, depression and anxiety.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of PTSD usually begin within three months after experiencing or being exposed to a traumatic event. Occasionally, symptoms may emerge years afterward. For a diagnosis of PTSD, symptoms must last more than one month.

- **Re-experiencing type symptoms**, such as recurring, involuntary and intrusive distressing memories, which can include flashbacks or bad dreams.
- **Avoidance**, which can include staying away from certain places or objects that are reminders of the traumatic event.

- **Cognitive and mood symptoms**, which can include trouble recalling the event or negative thoughts about one's self. A person may also feel numb, guilty, worried or depressed.
- **Arousal symptoms**, such as hypervigilance. Examples might include being intensely startled by stimuli that resembles the trauma, trouble sleeping or outbursts of anger.

Young children can also develop PTSD, and the symptoms are different from those of adults. It is essential that a child be assessed by a professional who is skilled in the developmental responses to stressful events. A pediatrician or child mental health clinician can be a good start.

## Treatment

Though PTSD cannot be cured, it can be treated and managed in several ways.

- **Psychotherapy**, such as cognitive processing therapy or group therapy
- **Medications**
- **Self-management strategies**, such as self-soothing and mindfulness which can help ground a person and bring her back to reality after a flashback
- **Service animals**, especially dogs, can help soothe some of the symptoms of PTSD

**You are not alone. We can help you or someone you love cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.**

Visit [www.centermh.org/help](http://www.centermh.org/help) to take a fast, confidential online screening test.

*Information provided by the National Alliance on Mental Illness.*



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