

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that is caused by experiencing a deeply disturbing event that is threatening to one's own or another's physical or emotional safety. PTSD as a diagnosis was developed in response to traumatic symptoms of war veterans and it was once thought that children could not develop PTSD; however, we now know that that assumption was wrong.

What To Look For:

PTSD greatly affects a child or teen's sense of physical and emotional safety and as a result they view their world with significant and persistent fear. Symptoms include:

- generalized fear and anxiety -separation anxiety / clinginess to parents -avoidance of aspects (sights, sounds, smells, places) related to the trauma -sleep disturbance and nightmares -repetitive play depicting aspects related to the trauma -regression (i.e. the loss of a previously acquired skill such as toilet training) -feeling constantly alert and being easily startled -physical complaints -irritability -withdrawal -aggression -difficulty concentrating -emotional numbness or not caring -guilt (i.e. feeling responsible for the event) -diminished interest in pleasurable activities

Possible Causes:

PTSD symptoms can occur as a result of either directly witnessing or being deeply personally impacted by a traumatic event such as:

- natural disasters such as floods -man-made disasters such as plane crashes -school shootings or even bullying -automobile accidents -physical abuse -sexual abuse or rape -neglect -being exposed to domestic violence -parental or peer death or suicide -community violence -being the victim of robbery or other assaults -life threatening illnesses and associated medical treatments

Risk Factors:

Not everyone exposed to a traumatic event develops PTSD. In fact, even when exposed to the same event, some individuals will develop symptoms and others will not. Response to trauma are influenced by the following:

- severity of the trauma -physical proximity to the trauma -the number of experienced traumatic events -individual attributes such as coping skills -age: the younger the child, the more likely symptoms are to develop due to a lack of verbal skills and cognitive understanding -gender: girls are affected at a higher rate

Treatment Options:

For a diagnosis of PTSD, symptoms must be present for more than one month after the event; however, that does not mean that treatment should wait. Of paramount importance is to seek immediate assistance. Although PTSD often has long-standing affects, it is treatable.

- Psychotropic Medication to decrease symptoms - Individual Therapy to identify, express, and process feelings and to learn anxiety-reducing strategies thru talk, play, and art, -Psycho-Education to create a supportive, understanding, and nurturing environment - Family Psychotherapy to help additional family members that may themselves be experiencing symptoms -Community Support or Group Therapy to process feelings with others who experienced the same or similar trauma -School Services to minimize the negative affects of symptoms on academic progress

How You Can Help:

- Encourage your child or teen to label and express their feelings -Support, understand, and praise your child without criticizing symptoms, particularly regressive behaviors -As much as possible maintain structure and routines as before the incident -Allow you child to make choices, even simple ones, to regain a sense of control - Seek help for yourself or other family members that may also have been exposed to the trauma

Therapy Etc