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POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER



PTSD

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a *reaction* which often occurs when a person has been exposed to extreme stress, trauma, or painful experiences. In other words, the person has *experienced or witnessed* actual or threatened bodily injury or some other extreme situation.

The reaction includes these major features:

- ✓ Re-living or re-experiencing the event, often so vividly that it seems to have happened just yesterday. Perhaps the re-experiencing comes as a flashback, so real it feels as if it were happening now.
- ✓ Intrusive images of the event invade the mind often at unexpected moments, or when the person wants to rest. The images may come as dreams or nightmares.
- ✓ Hyper-vigilance, meaning the person is jumpy, startles easily, or is on the alert for danger, as if the event were going to happen again. The person may feel unsafe and expect to be harmed again.

STRESSORS

The stressor may be a one-time event, such as an assault, a car accident, a natural disaster, such as a tornado, or being witness to a horrific event.

Or the stressor may be a long-term repeated series of events, such as being raised in a home where there is physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

Any such events may intrusively flood the mind years later.

Some common PTSD stressors include:

1. Serious motor vehicle, airplane, or boating accident
 2. Industrial accidents
 3. Disasters (tornadoes, hurricanes, flood, fires)
 4. Robbery, mugging, or a shooting
 5. Military combat (in fact, PTSD was formerly known as "shell shock" or "war neurosis")
 6. Rape, incest, child sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, or neglect
 7. Being a refugee from a war area
- ✓ Assault and rape are the most common traumata in women.
 - ✓ Women with substance abuse problems have a high rate of PTSD.



Psychotherapy. Psychotherapy can help you see how reliving the trauma is structuring your life. It can help restore a sense of control in your life. You can learn new coping skills. You can change the thoughts and beliefs which are shaped by the trauma.

Psychological procedures can help desensitize stimuli that were reminding you of the trauma so you won't be sensitive to them anymore. Because the trauma can alter one's identity and self-worth, it may take considerable time to repair the psychic damage, including any associated depression.

But often, the effects of a single traumatic event can be resolved quickly using a therapy known as EMDR (eye-movement desensitization and re-processing) or a CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) procedure known as "prolonged exposure." Due to extensive research and high levels of effectiveness, EMDR and CBT are two approaches which approved for treating trauma.

The psychotherapies for PTSD include:

Behavior Therapy - changing the symptoms by using Relaxation therapy to reduce anxiety, Breath Training to prevent arousal of anxiety, and Thought Stopping to interrupt the disturbing thoughts.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - changing the thought patterns which have been produced by coping with the trauma. Cognitive Behavioral Prolonged Exposure Therapy - Concentrating on the memories and stimuli associated with the trauma until the anxiety is reduced.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing [EMDR] - The memories, thoughts, and emotions associated with the trauma are brought to mind, and, while you concentrate on the experience, the therapist will stimulate the left and right sides of your brain by having you move your eyes. This activity stimulates the brain to change the emotions associated with the memory, so that the distress connected with it stops. In the photo, a woman is watching lights go back and forth on the bar while she listens to tones which are synchronized with the lights.



Outcome. EMDR resolves symptoms of PTSD nearly completely in 80 to 85% of patients in about 2-8 weeks. Although they may take longer, other therapies reduce symptoms completely or to a mild level in 70% of patients. Sertraline (Zoloft) reduces symptoms by about 50% in 3 months, and many symptoms are resolved by 9 months.

Children. Children do very well in treatment for trauma. Because they are vulnerable and young, trauma can affect them deeply and for many years. Many traumas of childhood, including abuse, neglect, rape or sexual abuse at an early age, and verbal abuse, shape



children's lives forever,. Sometimes, experiences with an alcoholic parent can trigger PTSD-like reactions. Sadly, early experiences can undermine a child's sense of self-worth. On the other hand, children respond well to EMDR, to Art Therapy, and to Family Therapy. Children do best when they feel their parents protect them from harm, listen and believe them, and provide comfort for their anxieties and fears.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Not everyone exposed to a 'traumatic' experience will develop PTSD. A simple rule of thumb is 1/3 of people will be relatively unscathed by such an event. About 1/3 will develop PTSD or some of its symptoms. About 1/3 will be in the middle, with mild effects. Looking at factors which cause people to be more resilient in the face of a traumatic event, we see a few factors which protect against PTSD:

- ✓ previous, effective experiences coping with difficult circumstances
- ✓ preparation and rehearsal for managing a difficult event
- ✓ a community which comes together to support victims of trauma, with people working together to overcome the impact
- ✓ feeling one is protected from further harm and is safe, since loss of safety is common in trauma

First responders and military veterans often develop PTSD despite their training. Despite protective factors, some traumatic experiences are so severe that they could cause anyone to develop PTSD.

The key points are

- ★ Anyone could develop PTSD. There is no shame in that.
- ★ PTSD can mask itself as substance abuse, anxiety, phobia, or depression.
- ★ PTSD is treatable. You can improve.
- ★ Find a therapist with specialized training in traumatic disorders, such as therapists who know EMDR or prolonged exposure or trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy.

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