



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk



This leaflet should be read alongside the leaflet “Understanding anxiety” also produced by Fife Clinical Psychology Department, available on www.moodcafe.co.uk.

What is Post Traumatic Stress disorder?

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the name given to a group of psychological problems. These problems can occur when a person experiences, or sees, a traumatic event, or a series of traumatic events.

Traumatic events: A traumatic event is one that makes a person feel that he or she, or other people, are under threat.

PTSD can be caused in various ways:

- By a single event, e.g. being attacked, or being involved in an accident; or
- By a series of events, e.g. being physically, or sexually abused; or
- By a long-lasting episode during which the individual feels threatened in some way, e.g. by being ‘stalked’, or harassed at work.

For an event to be traumatic, it does not have to be dangerous. Instead, what matters is whether the person feels threatened. E.g. even a minor accident can cause PTSD because, after the accident, the person no longer feels safe in his/her car.

Differences between people

The main features of PTSD are given below. Not everyone who has experienced trauma will have all of these features but most people will show some of them.

Sometimes, they appear a few weeks after the trauma. However, with some types of trauma, the main features might not show until months, or even years, later. In many

cases, the features disappear after a few weeks. However, they can last for months and years. How long they last and how badly a person is affected depends mainly upon the following:

- The nature of the trauma
- Whether the person had experienced previous traumatic events
- The sorts of support and advice which s/he received after the trauma
- How well s/he usually copes with stress.

Features of PTSD

1. Re-experiencing of the traumatic event

A person who has PTSD re-experiences the traumatic event(s). This can be 'out of the blue' or when they are reminded of the event(s). E.g. by returning to the scene, by hearing a loud noise or by seeing a TV programme.

Examples of re-experiencing include:

- Having thoughts or memories of the event(s) pop into their head even when they are busy doing something else
- Having frightening dreams or nightmares, not necessarily about the event(s)
- Having vivid mental pictures (flashbacks) of the event(s)
- Feeling very anxious or upset when reminded of the event(s)

2. Avoiding anything to do with the event(s)

The person will try to avoid doing things that might remind him or her of the traumatic event(s).

Examples of this include:

- Trying to avoid talking about the event(s)
- Trying to avoid thinking about, or remembering, the event(s)
- Not being able to recall some important aspect of the event(s)
- Avoiding places, things, or people connected with the event(s)

3. Unusual emotions and feelings

The person can have feelings that are very different to ones that s/he has had before. Often this is because s/he has become more aware that life is temporary.

Examples of this include:

- Losing interest in activities that s/he used to enjoy
- Being very alert to possible dangers, e.g. carrying out unnecessary safety checks, or being 'wary' of others
- 'Numbing', i.e. the person is unable to experience some emotions, e.g. is unable to have loving feelings

4. Guilt and self-blame

The person often feels guilty or blames him or herself for aspects of the event(s). E.g. that s/he survived when other did not, that s/he did not do more to help him/herself, or that s/he has been so badly affected.

5. Signs of anxiety or stress

Anxiety and stress affect people in different ways.

Some examples include:

- Headaches; chest pains; butterflies; difficulty sleeping; tiredness
- Poor concentration; forgetfulness; making stupid mistakes, taking longer over things
- Smoking more; drinking more; being restless; losing interest in sex
- Being more irritable; having outbursts of anger; loss of self-confidence; being more tense; feeling something bad is going to happen; feeling depressed

Overcoming PTSD

Books that can help

Books on PTSD:

- Overcoming Childhood Trauma by H Kennerley
- Overcoming Traumatic Stress by C Herbert & A Wetmore

Books on anxiety:

- Overcoming Anxiety by H Kennerley
- Overcoming Panic by D Silove
- Overcoming Panic, Anxiety & Phobias New Strategies to Free Yourself from Worry and Fear by C Goldman & S Babior

These and other books are also available through the fife book prescription scheme.

More information is available at moodcafé - www.moodcafe.co.uk/books-that-can-help.aspx

Self-help leaflets/courses

- Living Life is a free telephone service that offers guided self-help. More information is available on the NHS 24 website - www.nhs24.com/UsefulResources/LivingLife
- There are leaflets that cover other types of anxiety disorders on moodcafé – www.moodcafe.co.uk.

Organisations that can help

There are lots of organisations out there that can help. Some have helplines that you can contact to have a chat about your anxiety.

Specific to PTSD:

- UK Psychological Trauma Society – Provides a list of all current UK Trauma services - www.ukpts.co.uk/site/trauma-services
- Combat Stress - If you are an ex-serviceman/woman combat stress provides a helpline 0800 138 1619, text 07537 404 719 or email combat.stress@rethink.org.

Anxiety and Panic:

- Anxiety UK - www.anxietyuk.org.uk, helpline – 08444 775 774 (Mon-Fri 9:30am-5:30pm)
- No more panic - www.nomorepanic.co.uk. Includes a forum where you can chat to people who are having similar problems.

For more national helplines and organisations check our moodcafé -

www.moodcafe.co.uk/national-helplines/national-helplines-and-groups-in-fife.aspx.

Treatment for PTSD

Most treatment for PTSD is psychological. Treatment involves helping the person to face up to what is making them anxious, e.g. by trying the things that they are avoiding and by speaking about what they have experienced. Treatment is gradual and people work at their own rate. Some people find that medication (prescribed by their GP) can also be of help.

How to access further help

If you find you are getting worse, or think you might need further help overcoming your PTSD, speak to your GP.

Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources

