



PTSD Resource Guide

Overviewⁱ

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition brought on by exposure to a disturbing event. Children who suffer from PTSD may exhibit detachment, difficulty sleeping, and irritability; they also often dream about the traumatic event, or reenact it during playtime. Though PTSD-like symptoms are common among children and adolescents exposed to trauma, the disorder is rare in young people.

Symptomsⁱ

- Difficulty sleeping and frequent nightmares about the traumatic event
- Detachment, irritability, and frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Recreating the traumatic event during play
- Young children may regress—begin wetting the bed again, stop speaking, or become overly clingy with parents
- Adolescents may exhibit feelings of guilt and engage in self-destructive behavior

Causesⁱ

PTSD is a failure to rebound or recover in a healthy way after experiencing a traumatic event. Violence, physical or sexual abuse, extreme neglect, bullying, bad accidents, and natural disasters can trigger PTSD. What causes one child to bounce back from a disturbing experience and another to develop PTSD? Susceptibility seems to run in families but it's not known whether that reflects a genetic component or that children learn unhealthy responses to trauma from their parents.

Helping a Family Member with PTSDⁱⁱ

If someone in your family has PTSD, it can be a hard time for family members too. Your loved one with PTSD may have symptoms that interfere with your relationship and change family life. If your loved one has PTSD, you may also be coping with these difficult feelings:

- Depressed or angry about the changes in family life.
- Fearful if your loved one is angry or aggressive.
- Reluctant to talk about the trauma or avoiding situations that might upset your loved one.
- Angry or resentful toward your loved one.
- Tired from sleep problems because of worry, depression or because of your loved one's sleep problems.
- Isolated if your partner refuses to socialize.
- Emotional distance from your partner.



The stress of PTSD can affect all members of the family. If PTSD is affecting your family, consider contacting a mental health professional for individual, couples or family counseling. Through counseling, you can get the help you and your family needs to cope and support each other.

Treatmentⁱ

The treatment for PTSD often requires both behavioral therapy and medication.

Behavioral: Psychotherapy that helps children speak, draw, play, or write about their trauma has been successful in easing symptoms. In other cases, your child's clinician might recommend behavior modification techniques and cognitive therapy to teach your child to cope with his or her fear instead of addressing the trauma directly. Therapy sessions for children almost always involve a parent, a family member, or another caregiver.

Pharmacological: Medication such as an antidepressant or an anti-anxiety drug may be prescribed to help alleviate fear and anxiety.

ⁱ Child Mind Institute (2015). Quick Facts on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. <http://www.childmind.org/en/quick-facts-post-traumatic-stress-disorder/>

ⁱⁱ Mental Health America (2015). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>