



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Have you ever experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, such as being physically attacked, engaging in combat overseas or a natural disaster? If so, it is possible that you will develop a form of anxiety known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

Sometimes called “shell shock” or “combat fatigue”, PTSD is common in soldiers returning from war; however, despite its prevalence in veterans, PTSD can occur in all men and women, adults and children and all cultural and socioeconomic groups. In 1995 it was estimated that the lifetime prevalence of PTSD was 5 percent in men and 10 percent in women, according to the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Those suffering from PTSD may experience flashbacks brought on by something as simple as a smell, or sound that reminds them of the trauma. Sometimes, it is so severe that they feel as though they are actually reliving the trauma! Their sleep may be disrupted by nightmares and panic. Anxiety attacks can be triggered by a serious fear that the trauma will reoccur. Most sufferers feel detached from the rest of the world and have distrust for others. Other symptoms include agitation, anger, inability to concentrate and being easily startled. Left untreated, these symptoms often worsen and can significantly impact a person’s life.

The National Center for PTSD says that trauma survivors need to know that:

- Traumas happen to many competent, healthy, strong, good people.
- Many people have long-lasting problems following exposure to trauma.
- People who react to traumas are *not* going crazy. Their symptoms and problems are connected with the traumatic situation.
- Having symptoms after a traumatic event is *not* a sign of personal weakness. Many psychologically well-adjusted and physically healthy people develop PTSD.
- When a person understands trauma symptoms better, he or she can become less fearful of them and manage to cope better.

Events That May Lead to PTSD

If you have had any of the following experiences, you may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and should consider seeking professional treatment.

- WITNESSED A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT, OR BEEN INVOLVED IN ONE SUCH AS:
 - military combat
 - natural disasters (tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, mudslides)
 - terrorist incidents
 - serious accidents
 - drowning or near drowning
- SUFFERED A PERSONAL ASSAULT, SUCH AS:
 - abuse
 - rape
 - being mugged
 - hostage situations

Treating PTSD is possible.

Psychologist Tracy Dawyduk explains that those who refuse to deal with trauma will develop abnormal responses to normal things and brain changes can cause benign situations to seem more severe than they really are. In essence, she says, if you don’t deal with the trauma, it will deal with you.

The most successful treatment is a combination of psychotherapy and medication. Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT) is the most effective form of psychotherapy. The goal of this type of therapy is to unlearn fearful reactions to trauma and learn new ways of responding by changing thought patterns. Another form of psychotherapy is Exposure, or desensitization. During this therapy, the sufferer is exposed in small steps to situations that trigger his fears until he is able to cope effectively. Finally, Group Therapy can be ideal because trauma survivors can share their experiences in a safe and understanding setting. They learn to trust others and learn different coping methods that have worked for others in similar situations.

For more information on PTSD and its symptoms or treatment, please visit the National Center for PTSD at www.ncptsd.org, or call Portage Path Behavioral Health at 330-253-3100 for local treatment options.



Tips to Help Friends and Loved Ones Suffering from PTSD

- **ENCOURAGE TREATMENT** - Problems arise when there is no outlet for the pain. A pathology can be developed, making daily life even more difficult. Treatment is a healing process that is safe and effective in eliminating debilitating symptoms.
- **BELIEVE WHAT THE SUFFERER IS SAYING** - To him, his pain, anxiety, paranoia and fear is very real and based on a very real trauma. Don't doubt the strength of his emotions.
- **LISTEN SUPPORTIVELY** - But don't force her to talk. If she isn't ready to discuss the trauma, it can be more painful to be pushed into reliving it through memory.
- **BE INVOLVED WITH TREATMENT** - But only when appropriate. If your loved one and his therapist think it is appropriate to discuss treatment and how to carry the treatment over to the home setting, listen closely and follow the instructions. Don't jump in, however, unless you are invited to be part of the treatment process.
- **DON'T JUDGE RECOVERY TIME** - There is no set recovery time for PTSD. Personality factors, the severity of the trauma and the length the trauma endured, as well as the strength of the support system available all affect the recovery process. Avoid phrases like "Pull yourself out of it" or "You should be over it by now" and "Worse things could happen." To the sufferer, what happened truly IS the worst thing that could happen and repeated flashbacks and reoccurring memories only repeat the trauma. These phrases, while surely intended to be helpful, are actually harmful to the recovery process.



Recommended Lifestyle Changes to Take Control

adapted from the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Those with PTSD need to take active steps to deal with their PTSD symptoms. Often, these steps involve making a series of thoughtful changes in one's lifestyle to reduce symptoms and improve quality of life. Some of these positive changes include:

- Calling about treatment and joining a support group.
- Learn about trauma and PTSD. Also talk with your doctor.
- Increase contact with other survivors of trauma.
- Reinvest in personal relationships with family and friends.
- Change neighborhoods - It is not a good idea for people with PTSD to live in a high crime area because it only makes feelings of danger worse and confirms these beliefs of fear.
- Refrain from alcohol and drug abuse - these substances only provide distractions and they hinder treatment and recovery.
- Start an exercise program - this is a positive distraction and a way to relieve physical tension.
- Start to volunteer in the community - By helping, you have a sense of contribution and a sense of being worthwhile.
- Practice relaxation methods including meditation, breathing, yoga, prayer and listening to quiet music.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call **Portage Path** and find out how we can help:

Web Site www.portagepath.org

Appointments **330-253-3100**
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline **330-434-9144**
888-434-8878



portage path behavioral health
state-of-the-art care for your state of mind.