

## **Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Anyone who is exposed to a traumatic event or situation, whether it happened to them or they witnessed it, is likely to experience some degree of post-traumatic stress (PTS). Some examples could be:

- Car/transportation accidents
- The death of a loved one
- Bullying
- Rape/sexual assault
- Physical assault
- Sexual or physical abuse
- Childhood neglect
- Conflict/war
- Natural disasters
- Terrorist incidents

Trauma can also be cumulative e.g. a repeated number of smaller traumas collectively creating a disturbance over the years. PTS is a very normal response to a very difficult experience or event, as the brain tries to protect you from potential danger. For some people it can make day-to-day living extremely difficult.

### **Why do I feel like this?**

A traumatic event threatens a sense of safety, stability and sense of self. The human brain is unable to routinely process such extreme stresses and becomes overwhelmed with information that it cannot easily make sense of (process). The experience becomes “frozen in time/unprocessed” almost like a CD of the event has been stored in your mind and can be called upon at any time if triggered. This includes sensory memories of smell, touch, taste, hearing and vision, also emotional response and bodily sensations felt at the time of the trauma.

In most cases, after a period of time, the distressing recollections and disturbance will subside (the brain naturally processes these), however for some people this is not the case and symptoms can persist, suggestive of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

PTSD is diagnosed by a suitably qualified mental health profession such as a Psychiatrist or Psychologist and involves history taking and assessment of presenting difficulties. Presenting difficulties fall in to the following categories:

**Intrusions:** Troublesome pictures/images of the incident, dreams/nightmares, thoughts, flashbacks (reliving the incident), sounds and bodily sensations, – sometimes triggered by other things but not always.

**Hyper-arousal:** Feeling anxious and emotionally overwhelmed, waves of panic, jumpy, poor concentration, poor sleep, irritable and alert to danger (hyper vigilant), sometimes feelings of anger and aggression.

**Avoidance:** Avoiding anything (people, places, situations, talking, thoughts of the trauma) that might trigger the trauma symptoms.

**Negative alteration in Cognitions (thoughts) and mood:** Amnesia (loss of memory of key events of the trauma), negative beliefs about self, blaming, trauma related emotions (fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame), diminished interest in activities, can't feel positive emotions, detachment/estrangement from others.

### How can I find help?

#### Self-help:

- Set aside some time each day to think about what happened – maybe you can write down your thoughts, memories, feelings and emotions. This addresses the avoidant nature of trauma and can help take some of the power out of the experience.
- Talk to people you can trust and tell them how you are feeling. It's good to go over what has happened as it helps your brain to reprocess the experience.
- Try not to block feelings and emotions. Allow yourself to be upset if you need to be.
- Give yourself time out to do things that you enjoy. Distraction also has an important part to play in your recovery.
- Try not to rely on alcohol or any other substances to manage the feelings

You may find the following self-help booklets helpful – copy and paste in to your browser:

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/posttrauma.asp>

<http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/leaflets/Post%20traumatic%20Stress%20A4%202015.pdf>

#### Psychological Help:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE Guidelines) 2005 recommend the following two pathways for trauma therapy:

A) Trauma Focussed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy –

<http://www.babcp.com/Public/What-is-CBT.aspx>

B) Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR Therapy) – see link below

[www.emdrassociation.org.uk](http://www.emdrassociation.org.uk)

Counselling and other therapies can also be helpful. You can find out more about different therapies from the link below:

<http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/what-is-therapy/types-of-therapy>

Other useful links:

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/#.WCubLaKLSu0>

[http://www4.ntu.ac.uk/student\\_services/health\\_wellbeing/self\\_help/index.html](http://www4.ntu.ac.uk/student_services/health_wellbeing/self_help/index.html)