

PTSD (POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER)

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1. DEFINITION:

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH):

“PTSD is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. . . . Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened even when they are not in danger.”

2. SYMPTOMS

In the educational setting, the following symptoms of PTSD may be noticed:

- difficulty maintaining focus and attention,
- memory problems,
- delayed responses,
- emotional outbursts
- impulsive behavior

NIMH Categorizes the symptoms of PTSD as follows:

Re-experiencing symptoms include:

- Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating
- Bad dreams
- Frightening thoughts

Re-experiencing symptoms may cause problems in a person’s everyday routine. The symptoms can start from the person’s own thoughts and feelings. Words, objects, or situations that are reminders of the event can also trigger re-experiencing symptoms.

Avoidance symptoms include:

- Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience
- Avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event

Arousal and reactivity symptoms include:

- Being easily startled
- Feeling tense or “on edge”
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having angry outbursts

Cognition and mood symptoms include:

- Trouble remembering key features of the traumatic event
- Negative thoughts about oneself or the world
- Distorted feelings like guilt or blame
- Loss of interest in enjoyable activities

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

3. CAUSES

PTSD in can be caused by many factors.

- Loss of a family member, schoolmate or friend
- Fear for their lives, observing serious injury or the death of another person
- Family members or friends missing after the event
- Getting sick or becoming hurt due to the event
- Home loss, family moves, changes in neighborhoods, changes in schools or loss of belongings
- Being unable to evacuate quickly
- Past traumatic experiences or losses
- Pet loss
- Past history of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety or mood disorders coupled with any of the above

(This list that was found in <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3287974/> This article that also contains additional information on PTSD in children.)

Additional factors that can cause PTSD in adults include:

- Exposure to war
- Physical and sexual abuse
- Mental/ emotional/ psychological abuse
- Natural disasters or catastrophes
- Unexpected loss of a loved one

4. RESILIENCY FACTORS

The NIMH lists the following factors that may reduce the risk of PTSD:

- Seeking out support from other people, such as friends and family
- Finding a support group after a traumatic event
- Learning to feel good about one's own actions in the face of danger
- Having a positive coping strategy, or a way of getting through the bad event and learning from it
- Being able to act and respond effectively despite feeling fear