



## MONTHLY MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Presented by the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office Mental Health Task Force

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



### What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event.

Fear may cause neurochemical/ hormonal changes in the body to help defend against danger, ex., "fight-or-flight". This response is meant to protect us from harm. PTSD can create the same or similar responses without the presence of danger.

We all experience a range of reactions after trauma. While some return to normal soon after the event, others continue to experience problems like fear and anxiety indefinitely. Those persons may suffer from PTSD.

### Understanding the dynamics of PTSD

Many people that experience trauma experience short term symptoms afterwards, but the majority do NOT develop ongoing (chronic) PTSD.

Not everyone with PTSD has been through a dangerous event. Some experiences, like the sudden, unexpected death of a loved one, can also cause PTSD.

Symptoms usually begin early, within 3 months of the traumatic incident, but sometimes they can begin years later.

Symptoms must last more than a month and be severe enough to interfere with relationships, daily activities and/or work to be considered PTSD.

The course of the illness varies. Some people recover within months, while others have symptoms that last much longer. In some people, the condition becomes chronic and affects their lives for years.

### How to help someone having a flashback or panic attack...

During a flashback, people often feel a sense of disassociation, as if they are detached from their own body. Anything you can do to "ground" them will help. (Ex. Repeating their name and where they are in calm, slow voice tones)

Tell the sufferer they are having a flashback and that even though it feels real, the event is not actually happening again. (do not meet their level of emotion)

Help them be mindful of the moment they are actually living in (for example, ask them to look around the room and describe out loud what they see). This is also a form of "grounding".

Encourage them to take deep, slow breaths (hyperventilating will increase feelings of panic).

Avoid sudden movements or anything that might startle them. Touching or putting your arms around them might make them feel trapped, which can lead to greater agitation and even violence.

### Diagnosing PTSD

To be diagnosed with PTSD an adult must present the following symptoms consistently for at least one month:

At least one re-experiencing symptom (flashbacks or reliving the trauma over and over. Includes physical symptoms such as increased respiration, rapid heart rate, trembling and/or increased perspiration. May also include bad dreams and/or frightening thoughts during waking hours)

At least one avoidance symptom (Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience. Avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event)

At least two arousal and reactivity symptoms (Being easily startled. Feeling tense or "on edge", Having difficulty sleeping, Having angry outbursts.)

At least two cognition and mood symptoms (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.)

### REFERENCES

The following sources were used in the creation of this Mental Health Newsletter. The G.C.S.O. Mental Health Tasks Force encourages you to utilize these and other sources such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to learn more about this important health topic.

Diagnostic Statistical Manual –V, American Psychiatric Association, June 2013

National Institute of Mental Health (2018). Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism/index.shtml>

