



Post-Traumatic Stress: What Is PTSD?

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

What Is PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a clinical diagnosis physicians apply to a constellation of symptoms that sometimes follow catastrophic or traumatic events including, but not limited to, the experience of or witnessing of combat, assault, rape, fire, chronic abuse, natural disasters or acts of terror. The body-mind-spirit is literally stressed beyond capacity, ravaged by events that may defy language.

Processed though the victim's personal filter, each person's experience of such an event will be different. Symptoms may be episodic in nature, diffuse, migratory or intense, and sometimes the post-traumatic stress response is delayed. Below are some characteristics of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Phenomena:

Vivid sensory flashbacks, sleep disturbance, anxiety or feelings of grief and depression, all of which intrude upon the process of integrating what has occurred into a revised reality.

Avoidance:

Physical isolation or emotional numbing, not thinking about or discussing the event, resorting to compulsive or addictive behaviors to escape the emotional sequelae of such traumatic events. (Note: If medication is indicated, a licensed mental-health professional or physician can help determine that and monitor one's response as well as modify dosage as needed over time.)

The Startle Response:

A healthy degree of caution makes a lot of sense. That's really what anxiety is intended for. Anxiety is a signal that something isn't right, and danger may be present. (Good to know!) The startle response, even observed in healthy infants, is Mother Nature's warning that makes us twitch or flinch at big booming sounds. (*Other than on July 4th, big booms are not usually good news.*) Following a disaster or traumatic event, hyper-arousal and hyper-vigilance can get stuck. (*Late one stormy night shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks here in New York, I found I needed to get up and look out a window to "see" a thunder storm. The following week was less so, but it is not unusual to make such associations follow a terribly frightening event.*)

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Not all stress is abnormal, nor is it always debilitating, and not all stress is PTSD. The human psyche can withstand considerable distress, and while many are deeply troubled and even permanently affected by deeply troubling experiences, one's personality, past, proximity and even biological makeup will influence how and to what extent we catalyze the human stress responses.

A Sampling of a Few PTSD-Related Websites:

Note: This is not an endorsement nor a complete list; rather a few well-known organizations, most of which evidence little or no commercial bias or gain. (Ads on these sites are clearly differentiated from health content.) These are intended as a starting point to help you to understand your own stress responses and to find professional help that will benefit you. See which of these you like or don't, and find more resources. Be vigilant about seeking only credible, unbiased support. Always check for the most current information available.

National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov>

Sidran Foundation (Traumatic Stress):

<http://www.sidran.org>

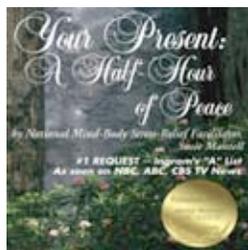
PTSD Alliance

<http://www.ptsdalliance.org>

National Library of Medicine - NIH Medline Plus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/posttraumaticstressdisorder.html>

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