



# What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD?

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, US Department of Veterans Affairs

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after you have been through a traumatic event. A traumatic event is something horrible and scary that you see or that happens to you. During this type of event, you think that your life or others' lives are in danger. You may feel afraid or feel that you have no control over what is happening.

Deriving from the Greek τραῦμα meaning “wound,” the word “trauma” has been used for centuries as a medical term to designate “an injury to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent.” Nonetheless, it was not until 1889 when Oppenheim first used the clinical descriptions of “traumatic neuroses” in victims of railroad accidents, that the word also encompassed a psychological meaning. Hermann Oppenheim was a German neurologist, and the first to conceptualize psychological trauma in his 1891 treatise on “traumatic neuroses” (*Weitere Mitteilungen über die traumatischen Neurosen*) based on clinical observations of railway, factory, and construction accident victims.



# Childhood Trauma and Health

[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime)

# Let's talk....TRAUMA!

Trauma is defined as:

- ▶ Sudden
- ▶ Threat to life or physical integrity
- ▶ Outside normal experiences

Two Types:

- ▶ Type 1: single event
- ▶ Type 2: long-standing/repeated (not in DSM-5)

# Defining Trauma

## **Definition—according to duration of symptoms after the trauma:**

- Peri-traumatic:
  - symptoms lasting minutes or hours
- Acute Stress Disorder (ASD):
  - symptoms lasting 2/3 days to 1 month
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):
  - Symptoms for more than 1 month

# Life-Threatening Events

Anyone who has gone through a life-threatening event can develop PTSD. These events can include:

- ▶ Combat or military exposure
- ▶ Child sexual or physical abuse
- ▶ Terrorist attacks
- ▶ Sexual or physical assault
- ▶ Serious accidents, such as a car wreck.
- ▶ Natural disasters, such as a fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake.

# Signs and Symptoms

The most common symptoms of PTSD include the following:

- Re-experiencing the trauma (nightmares, intrusive recollections, flashbacks, traumatic play)
- Avoidance of traumatic triggers, memories and situations that remind the child of the traumatic event
- Exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself and the world arising from the event
- Persistent negative emotional state or inability to experience positive emotions
- Feelings of detachment from people

# Signs and Symptoms

- Marked loss of interest in or participation in significant activities
- Inability to remember part of the traumatic event
- Sleep problems
- Irritability
- Reckless or self-destructive behavior
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle
- Concentration problems

# Diagnosing PTSD in those 6 years of age and older:

The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*, lists the following diagnostic criteria for PTSD in adults, adolescents, and children older than 6 years:

- ▶ Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence (any undesired sexual activity is sexual violence).
- ▶ Presence of 1 or more specified intrusion symptoms in association with the traumatic event(s) (i.e., it is the inability to keep memories of the event from returning).
- ▶ Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s)
- ▶ Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic events(s)
- ▶ Duration of the disturbance exceeding 1 month
- ▶ Clinically significant distress or impairment in important areas of functioning
- ▶ Inability to attribute the disturbance to the physiologic effects of a substance or another medical condition

# Managing the PTSD of your students

The initial goals of treatment for children with PTSD are as follows:

- ▶ Provide a safe environment
- ▶ Reassurance, emotional support, nurturance
- ▶ Attend to urgent medical needs
- ▶ Help the child gain a sense of safety
- ▶ Address the multiple emotional and behavioral problems that can arise

# Key Tips for Counselors and Parents

- ▶ **Tip #1: Be an active listener!** Encourage your child to talk to you about what happened and any feelings he or she might have about the event. This can be an important part of your child's recovery. For younger children who might have difficulty or be unable to talk about a trauma, encourage them to draw a picture or story about what happened.
- ▶ **Tip #2:** Remind your child that it was not his or her fault, and provide lots of love!
- ▶ **Tip #3:** Remember: not all children and teens who experience a trauma will develop PTSD.

# Strategies to Keep in Mind

1. Be alert to when a child is about to go into “Survival Mode.” Students may:
  - ▶ Get a “deer-in-the-headlights” look
  - ▶ Turn red and clench his or her fists
  - ▶ Breathe more rapidly
  - ▶ Begin moving because his or her body is getting ready to run or react
  - ▶ Burst into tears or look as if he or she is about to cry

# Strategies to Keep in Mind

**2. Create calm, predictable transitions.** “Uh, oh! What’s going to happen now?”

The important thing is to build a routine around transitions so that children know: a) what the transition is going to look like, b) what they’re supposed to be doing, and c) what’s next.

# Strategies to Keep in Mind

**3. Praise publicly and criticize privately.** (Why is this important? Talk among yourselves and explore some reasons.) For children who have experienced complex trauma, getting in trouble can sometimes mean either they or someone they are close to is going to get hurt!

# Strategies to Keep in Mind

## **4. Practice “Mindfulness” Techniques in the Classroom or Counseling setting.**

This can be a powerfully healing tool, but it can also be threatening for children who have experienced trauma, as the practice may bring up scary and painful emotions and body sensations.

# Strategies to Keep in Mind

## **5. Remember to practice Self-Care for YOU!**

If you are not doing well, your capacity to care for others is significantly diminished. The metaphor of putting on your own oxygen mask first before putting it on the child is very true in this situation.

## **6. Be ready to REFER!**