

## WHAT CAN I DO?

### Helping a friend or relative with PTSD

Maybe you know someone with PTSD, or you have a friend that's been through a traumatic experience. What can you do to help them?

Help them find the right doctor that can diagnose your friend's problem. Once it is determined that your friend has PTSD, encourage them to stay in treatment and follow the program. Here are some other things you can do to help a friend or relative:

- Try to learn as much as you can about PTSD so you can better understand what they are going through.
- Talk to them, but more importantly, be a good listener.
- Offer encouragement and emotional support.
- Ask them to join you in doing activities that will be a positive distraction for them, like riding bike, walking or going to the movies.
- Remember to remind your friend or relative that things will get better with time.

Most importantly, if the person you know that is diagnosed with PTSD ever makes comments that make you think they may harm themselves, report it to their doctor or therapist. Talk to your friend about suicide and let them know that it's not the answer.

## HEALTHY WAYS TO COPE WITH PTSD

- **Talk to a health professional.** Although results may not be immediate, most people do benefit from therapy and medications, but it takes time.
- **Stay healthy.** Maintain a balanced diet, stay rested and exercise.
- **Don't self-medicate.** Although it may seem like a quick way to cope, turning to drugs and alcohol will only make things worse.
- **Talk about it with someone you trust.** Stay in touch with your family, friends and faith leaders.
- **Talk to a support group.** There are many support groups geared towards individuals struggling with PTSD. Ask your health care professional for help finding one.
- **Break the cycle.** When you feel a flashback coming on, or are starting to feel anxious, try to do something to keep your mind elsewhere. Start a new hobby or do something you use to enjoy.

## TEST YOURSELF!

So, how much do you know about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? Take this short quiz and find out.

1. Drinking alcohol can help ease the pain associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Being abused as a child can cause symptoms of PTSD in adults.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. If left untreated, a person with PTSD could
  - a. Lose their job.
  - b. Suffer from depression.
  - c. Turn to drugs or alcohol
  - d. All of the above.
4. When a person with PTSD has flashbacks of their traumatic event, they are experiencing avoidance symptoms.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. PTSD is not diagnosed unless the symptoms have lasted for
  - a. One month
  - b. Two weeks
  - c. One year
  - d. Six months

Answers: 1. b; 2. a; 3. d; 4. b; 5. a

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# PTSD



## IT CAN GET BETTER



## WHAT IS PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that develops following a traumatic experience such as serious accidents, natural disasters, physical or sexual assault or military combat. Records of PTSD exist from many years ago but only in the 1980's was it recognized as a distinct disorder.

## WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

### Signs & Symptoms

PTSD symptoms can begin right after a traumatic experience, but the disorder is not diagnosed unless the symptoms have lasted for at least one month. There are three different types of symptoms that those suffering from PTSD can experience:

- 1. Re-experiencing Symptoms** – These symptoms involve re-living the traumatic event. These memories can sometimes feel so real, as if the event is happening all over again. These symptoms cause intense feelings of fear, helplessness and horror and include reoccurring flash backs or nightmares and intense reactions to triggers that symbolize or resemble the event.
- 2. Avoidance Symptoms** – These symptoms occur when the person is trying to avoid the traumatic event. They avoid situations that trigger memories. This may involve not going near places where the trauma occurred or avoiding sights, sounds or people that remind them of the event. These symptoms include feeling emotionally numb, strong guilt or depression and can cause a person to change his or her everyday routine.
- 3. Hyperarousal Symptoms** – Instead of being triggered by something, these symptoms are constant. Increased arousal can cause those suffering from PTSD to be easily startled, irritable and have difficulty concentrating. Someone suffering from hyperarousal symptoms may find that they are constantly on the lookout for danger. These symptoms make it difficult to do everyday tasks, such as sleeping and eating.

## DAZED AND CONFUSED

### PTSD's Effects

PTSD is very complicated and can begin at any time. These symptoms can lead to other conditions including:

- Alienation from friends and loved ones
- Unemployment
- Violence
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Homelessness
- Depression
- Suicide

## NO QUICK FIXES

### PTSD and Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Those who are suffering from PTSD often think that drinking a few beers or smoking a joint might seem like an easy way to forget about what happened, but the truth is that drugs and alcohol don't really fix anything, and often makes things worse. When you get drunk or high, you're not facing the real problem. You're just getting too wasted to care – and when you sober up, your problems will still be there.



## NOT WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

### Prescription Drug Abuse

Sometimes, doctors prescribe drugs to patients dealing with PTSD. It's a common misconception that prescription medications are safe for anyone to take – regardless of whose name is on the label. The truth is a lot more complicated than that, though.

It's never a good idea to take someone else's prescription drugs. In fact, using prescriptions that don't belong to you (or even taking extra doses of your own prescriptions) is another form of drug abuse. You never know how a drug will interact with your body, and some drugs can have serious or even fatal effects when combined with alcohol or other drugs.

## UNHEALTHY CHOICE

### The Effects of Alcohol & Drug Abuse

In addition to not really solving any of your problems, drug and alcohol abuse can actually lead to entirely new problems, such as:

- Trouble at work or school
- Legal problems related to drinking or illegal drugs
- Greater risk of driving while drunk, buzzed or high
- Greater risk of having unprotected sex or engaging in other dangerous behavior
- Overdose or alcohol poisoning
- Relationship problems
- Addiction

## KELLY'S STORY

Kelly was one of those girls that everyone liked. She was outgoing and willing to help anyone. Three months before graduating high school, she was out with some friends at a party a few blocks from her house. She lived in a pretty good neighborhood, so after the party was over, she walked home by herself, or so she thought.

A guy from the party followed her home. When she wasn't looking, he grabbed her and brought her behind a storage facility near her house. He beat her badly, raped her and left her for dead. Fortunately, Kelly recovered from her injuries, but she was destroyed mentally.

For many years, she was haunted by what happened. As an adult, she often had flashbacks of the traumatic event, and became unable to leave her apartment for weeks at a time, in fear of another attack. This eventually caused her to lose her job.

Years had passed and she started having less and less panic attacks and flashbacks. At the age of 36 and with two young children, things started feeling normal again. That is, until one night while watching the news, it was reported that a local woman was raped and killed. All of the bad memories started flooding back into Kelly's mind, as if it had just happened. She started having horrible thoughts of someone breaking into her home and harming her children. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw her attacker.

Kelly decided to go see her doctor, who diagnosed her with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She started taking a prescribed medication and saw a therapist once a week. She was finally able to move past her experience and live a normal life. She is no longer at the mercy of her attacker or her disorder.

