



# Steps Toward Healing from PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be complex, as the condition often intertwines with other comorbidities such as depression, sleep disorder or substance use disorder. Individuals who have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event can endure profound stress. Identifying this distress as PTSD involves recognizing a set of symptoms that persist for an extended period following exposure to trauma. While some people may find improvement over time, others require intervention from mental health professionals. If the symptoms and reactions stemming from your trauma significantly impact your daily life, you may be grappling with PTSD.

## How trauma presents in children

About 4% of children are exposed to trauma that leads to PTSD and over 33% of youths exposed to community violence will experience PTSD. Traumatic childhood experiences include abuse, witnessing violence, natural disasters, exploitation, loss of a parent or loved one, and other experiences that are outside a child's capacity to cope. Younger children may exhibit regressive behaviors such as bed wetting, clinginess or thumb sucking. They may also have difficulty sleeping, experience nightmares or display irrational fears. Older children and adolescents might demonstrate irritability, outbursts of anger, withdrawal from activities or relationships, and academic difficulties. They may also engage in risky behaviors or self-harm to cope with their emotions.

## How trauma presents in adults

About 5 in 100 U.S. adults has PTSD in a given year, and 70% of U.S. adults have experienced trauma at least once in their lives. Trauma in adults is influenced by their past experiences. Common symptoms include intrusive thoughts or memories of traumatic events, nightmares and flashbacks. Adults may also experience intense emotions such as fear, anger, guilt or shame. Avoidance behaviors, such as steering clear of places or activities that remind them of the trauma and emotional numbing are also common. Physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches or fatigue can arise as well. Additionally, adults may struggle with interpersonal relationships, experiencing difficulties in trust, intimacy and communication.

[More on Page 2](#)



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## Steps toward healing if you have PTSD

Reach out for professional help right away. The longer you go without treatment, the harder it can be to heal. The best place to start is to see a psychiatrist or other mental health provider. Your primary care physician, employee assistance programs, police departments, other health care providers and crisis hotlines can recommend counselors/therapists in your area. Therapy can provide a safe place for you and your family to talk about and cope with PTSD.

Be patient with yourself. Realize this will be a hard time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you've experienced and learn to be okay with slow progress.

Eat healthy, exercise and get enough sleep. When you're stressed, you're more open to illness. Eating a well-balanced diet and getting enough sleep can help you stay well. Regular exercise can relieve depression and stress.

### Try relaxation methods

These can include full-body relaxation or breathing exercises, meditation, stretching, yoga, listening to quiet music and spending time in nature settings.

### Join a support group

Being in a group with other people who have PTSD may help reduce isolation. It can also help rebuild your trust in others.

### Stay away from negative coping actions

These include using drugs or alcohol, workaholism, violent behavior and angry intimidation of others. These may seem to help by giving quick relief, but they worsen the illness and make recovery more difficult.

### Get involved and spend time with others

Attend a place of worship, book club, exercise class or other gatherings as often as you can. Consider volunteering to help at the American Red Cross, AmeriCares or other charitable groups. Helping others can give you a sense of purpose.

Most importantly, don't neglect your mental health. Show yourself the kindness you deserve, and don't try to tackle your problems alone. Lean on your support system, community, or a behavioral health professional to help you on your journey. Healing is possible.

## #HealTrauma

If you or someone you know is struggling with trauma, you can find additional resources through the National Center for PTSD, including the PTSD Coach mobile app. Veterans can contact the Veteran Crisis Line by dialing 988, then pressing 1.

