

# Steps Toward Healing from PTSD

## Understanding PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder can be hard to understand because it often occurs with other conditions like depression, sleep problems or substance use. People who experience or witness a traumatic event may face high levels of stress. PTSD is identified by symptoms that last for a long time after the trauma. Some people improve over time. Others need support from mental health professionals. If your trauma affects your daily life, you may be dealing with PTSD.

## How trauma shows up in children

About 4 percent of children experience trauma that leads to PTSD (SAMHSA). More than one-third of youths who face community violence will develop PTSD (National Council for Behavioral Health).

Traumatic events in childhood can include abuse, seeing violence, natural disasters, exploitation or the loss of a parent or loved one. These events can overwhelm a child's ability to cope.

### Younger children may:

- Return to earlier behaviors like bed wetting, clinginess or thumb sucking
- Have trouble sleeping or experience nightmares
- Show fears that seem unreasonable

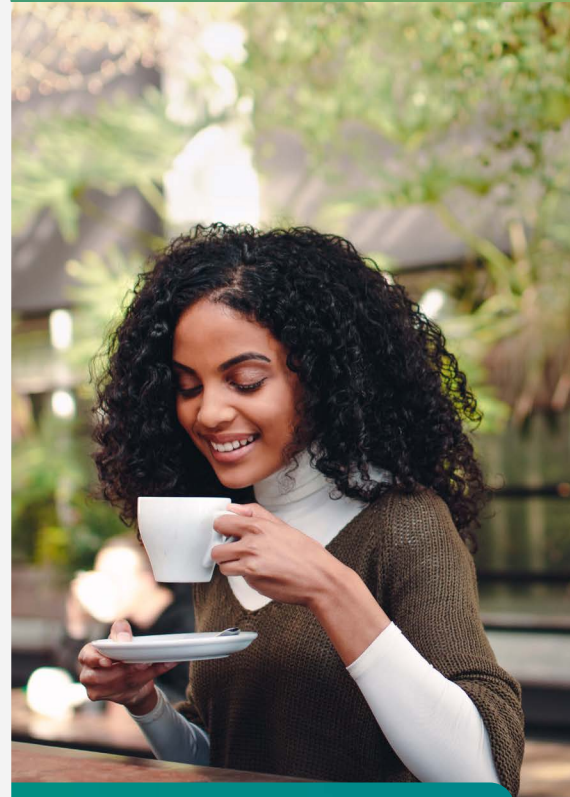
### Older children and teens may:

- Become irritable or have anger outbursts
- Pull away from friends, family or activities
- Struggle in school
- Take part in risky behaviors or self-harm to cope

## How trauma shows up in adults

About 5 in 100 U.S. adults has PTSD in a given year. About 70 percent of adults in the United States will experience trauma at least once in their lives (National Center for PTSD).

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National Center for PTSD

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An adult's trauma response is shaped by past experiences. Common symptoms include intrusive thoughts, unwanted memories, nightmares or flashbacks. Adults may feel strong emotions such as fear, anger, guilt or shame. Many people avoid places or activities that remind them of the trauma. Some may feel emotionally numb. Physical symptoms like headaches, stomach pain or fatigue can also appear. Trauma can make relationships harder to maintain.

## Steps toward healing if you have PTSD

### **Reach out for professional help**

Get support as soon as you can. Waiting can make recovery harder. A good first step is seeing a psychiatrist or another mental health provider. Your primary care doctor, employee assistance program, police department, crisis hotline or other health care provider can connect you with counselors or therapists. Therapy can give you and your family a safe space to talk and heal.

### **Be patient with yourself**

Healing takes time. Allow yourself to grieve what you have lost. Celebrate small steps forward.

### **Care for your body**

Eat healthy foods, exercise and get enough sleep. Stress can weaken your body. Staying active, eating well and resting can help reduce anxiety or depression.

### **Try relaxation methods**

Relaxation can help calm your mind and body. Try breathing exercises, meditation, stretching, yoga, quiet music or spending time in nature.

### **Join a support group**

Talking with others who have PTSD can help you feel less alone. It may also rebuild your trust in others.

### **Avoid harmful coping behaviors**

Stay away from alcohol, drugs, workaholism, violent behavior or intimidating others. These may feel like short-term relief, but they make symptoms worse and slow recovery.

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### **Stay connected**

Spend time with others. Attend a place of worship, book club, exercise class or other group activity when you can. Volunteering with groups like the American Red Cross or AmeriCares may help you regain a sense of purpose.

### **You are not alone**

Most of all, do not ignore your mental health. Treat yourself with kindness and seek support when you need it. Reach out to your community, loved ones or a behavioral health professional. Healing is possible, and you deserve care.

## **#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.

*Reviewed by Medical Director, Doctor of Medicine*