



A Program of Conley Outreach Community Services  
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## Community Care Team News September/October 2005

This issue describes Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is estimated that 5.2 million Americans suffer from PTSD each year. It affects children as well as adults. Recent catastrophic events have increased the risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, not just in the Gulf region, but nationwide as people reflect on the magnitude of the devastation and the country's vulnerability.

### What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

PSTD is a real illness that people can experience after living through a frightening and dangerous event. Some people may even experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after watching repeated coverage of a terrible event on television.

### What are the Most Common Triggers?

PTSD can occur after being:

- Raped or sexually abused
- Hit or harmed by a family member
- A victim of a violent crime
- In an airplane or car crash
- In a hurricane, tornado or fire
- In a war
- In a life-threatening situation
- A witness to violence or disaster.

An anniversary date can also trigger PTSD.

### What are the Symptoms?

People with PTSD may:

- feel like the terrible event is happening all over again. This feeling comes without warning.
- have nightmares and scary memories of the terrifying event.
- stay away from places that remind them of the event.
- jump and feel upset when something happens without warning.
- have a hard time trusting or feeling close to other people.
- get mad easily.
- feel guilty because others died and they lived.
- have trouble sleeping.
- have muscle tension, stomach problems, headaches and other physical complaints.

### When Does PTSD Start and How Long does it Last?

Most people will experience physical and emotional symptoms after a traumatic event. To be diagnosed with PTSD, symptoms must last more than 1 month and interfere with normal functioning. For most people, PTSD starts within about three months of the traumatic event. For some people, PTSD symptoms don't show up until years later. Some people get better within six months, while others may have symptoms for much longer.

## How are Children Affected?

In addition to the general characteristics noted above, children may also:

- Worry about being alone or sleeping alone
- Have difficulty separating from a parent or loved one
- Be afraid of situations similar to the event (e.g. high winds, flying)
- Talk a lot about the event
- Complain frequently of physical illness such as headaches and stomachaches
- Have poor concentration
- Have difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Be more irritable than usual
- Develop an eating problem
- Exhibit regressive behavior (thumb sucking, bed wetting)

## Are Some People More Vulnerable to PTSD?

Research is continuing to reveal factors that may contribute to PTSD. People who have been abused as children or who have had other previous traumatic experiences are more likely to develop the disorder. In addition, it used to be believed that people who tend to be emotionally numb after a trauma were showing a healthy response; but now some researchers suspect that people who experience this emotional distancing may be more prone to PTSD.

As noted above, people differ in their vulnerability to PTSD, and the source of this difference is not known in its entirety. Researchers have identified factors that interact to influence vulnerability to developing PTSD. These factors include:

- Characteristics of the trauma exposure itself (e.g., proximity to trauma, severity, and duration),

- Characteristics of the individual (e.g., prior trauma exposures, family history/prior psychiatric illness, gender—women are at greatest risk for many of the most common assaultive traumas), and
- Post-trauma factors (e.g., availability of social support).

## What is the Treatment?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a treatable condition that responds well to medicine and therapy. Therapeutic approaches that have been used successfully with people with PTSD include:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Group therapy
- Exposure therapy, in which the person gradually and repeatedly relives the frightening experience under controlled conditions to help him or her work through the trauma
- Art therapy and play therapy (children).

Studies also have found that several types of medication, particularly the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and other antidepressants, can help relieve the symptoms of PTSD.

Other research shows that giving people an opportunity to talk about their experiences very soon after a catastrophic event may reduce some of the symptoms of PTSD.

Depression, alcohol/other substance abuse or other anxiety disorders may co-occur with PTSD. These conditions must be appropriately diagnosed and treated as part of the overall PTSD intervention.

**Conley Outreach Community Services**  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Resources 2005

Crisis Services

Suicide Prevention Services (SPS)	630/482-9699 (office)
SPS Depression Hotline	630/482-9696
Toll Free Suicide Prevention Hotline	1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
Crisis Line of the Fox Valley (AID)	630/966-9393
North Kane County Crisis Line (Ecker Center)	847/888-2211
DeKalb County Crisis Line (Ben Gordon)	815/758-6655

Mental Health/Psychiatric Services

AID (Association for Individual Development)	630/859-1291
Community Counseling Center	630/966-7400
Ecker Center for Mental Health	847/695-0484
Provena St. Joseph Hospital	847/695-3200
Provena Mercy Center	630/801-2657 (psychiatric services) 630/801-2625 (behavioral health)

Individual & Family Counseling

Ben Gordon Mental Health Center	815/756-4875
Community Counseling Center	630/966-7400
The Family Center of NIU	815/753-1684
Family Counseling Service	630/844-2662
Family Service Agency	815/758-8616
Heartland Counseling	630/365-0899
TriCity Family Services	630/232-1070

Websites

[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)  
[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)  
[www.medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com)  
[www.ptsdinfo.org](http://www.ptsdinfo.org)  
[www.mentalhealth.com](http://www.mentalhealth.com)  
[www.naptsd.va.gov](http://www.naptsd.va.gov)