

Matching Newsletter:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

November 2010

What is Trauma?

There are two kinds of trauma: physical and mental. Physical trauma is the body's response to threat and fear. Mental trauma is the mind's response to physical injury. It can provoke feelings such as withdrawal, detachment, a lack of focus, sleep problems, flashbacks, and the need to be on constant alert for future attacks.

What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that people may get after witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event. People with PTSD still feel threatened, even when they are no longer in danger. Anyone can get PTSD. War veterans, survivors of sexual assault, abuse, natural disasters or accidents, those who have witnessed a death of a family member or loved one, or who have witnessed a family member or loved one go through a traumatic event. Anyone from young children to adults can develop PTSD.

Symptoms:

Symptoms of PTSD in older children and teenagers include flashbacks, bad dreams, or frightening thoughts. Words, objects or situations that remind the individual of the traumatic event can trigger these symptoms. In addition, symptoms fall into two categories: avoidance symptoms and hyper-arousal symptoms. Avoidance symptoms are characterized by staying away from the places or objects that remind the person of the event, feeling emotionally "numb", feelings of strong guilt or worry, losing interest in activities they enjoyed, depression, or having trouble recalling the traumatic event. Hyper-arousal symptoms are characterized by feeling tense, or "on edge", being easily startled, having difficulty sleeping, or having angry outbursts. These symptoms make it hard for a person to perform daily tasks. Also, older children and teenagers with PTSD may develop disruptive, disrespectful and destructive behaviors, feelings of guilt, or thoughts of revenge. When symptoms last for only a few weeks, it is known as Acute Stress Disorder (ASD). However, when they last longer, it is PTSD. Sometimes symptoms of PTSD will not show up until weeks or months after the traumatic event.

Symptoms of PTSD in very young children include bed-wetting, when they know how to use the toilet; forgetting how, or being unable to talk; acting out the scary event when playing or being unusually clingy with a parent or adult.

How To Help:

There are a few things one can do at home to help a child or teenager with PTSD. Listening to the child or teenager and not arguing about how they are feeling is very important. They need to know that they have your support. Reducing other potential sources of stress, including sudden movements, frequent moving or changes in residence, long separations and fighting are all important. Monitoring the child's behavior to make sure there are no changes in appetite or mood is also good. Most importantly, it is important to remember that it takes time for a child or teenager to recover from a traumatic event, and showing the child patience, love and support is the best thing you can do.

Treatment:

Common treatments of PTSD are psychotherapy, medications, or both. It is important that the child is treated by a mental health care provider who is experienced in the area of PTSD. Different treatments work best for different people, so finding the one that works best for your child is key. Common medications include antidepressants like Zoloft or Paxil. Again, different medications work better for different people, so it is important to talk to a mental health care provider to find out if, and what, medication will be best for your child. In addition to talk therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is also very helpful. There are three parts to CBT: exposure therapy, cognitive restructuring, and stress inoculation training.

For more on treatment, symptoms and information on Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder, please visit the links provided below.

Resources:

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH):
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/complete-index.shtml>
- Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA):
<http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>

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