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# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(PTSD) ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING

Commission on  
Correctional  
Peace Officer  
Standards and  
Training



PTSD is a serious condition and is characterized by four main types of symptoms.

1. Re-experiencing a traumatic event through intrusive distressing recollections, flashbacks, and nightmares.
2. Emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people, and activities that are reminders of the trauma.
3. Feeling cut off from others and other negative alterations in cognitions (ways of thinking, understanding, learning, and remembering) and mood.

THESE SYMPTOMS USUALLY OCCUR WITHIN A FEW WEEKS OF A TRAUMA, BUT THEY MAY NOT APPEAR FOR SEVERAL MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS.

4. Marked changes in arousal and reactivity, including difficulty sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy, easily irritated, and angered.

## HELP YOURSELF:

- ◆ Talk to your doctor about treatment options
- ◆ Engage in mild physical activity or exercise to help reduce stress
- ◆ Break up large tasks into small ones, set priorities and do what you can.
- ◆ Spend time with trusted friends or relatives
- ◆ Identify and seek out comforting situations, places, and people.

**WHAT IS PTSD?** Many of us have witnessed or experienced a serious illness, an accident, a personal assault, or other traumatic events. With time the grief typically passes, the pain lessens, and life eventually gets back to normal. Most people recover from traumatic events, but some experience severe distress, anxiety, and depression for months or even years. They frequently re-experience the event through intrusive thoughts or upsetting nightmares, and have difficulty relaxing, concentrating, or sleeping. They often feel detached or estranged from loved ones. These are symptoms of a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

**TREATMENT:** The main treatments for people with PTSD are medications, psychotherapy (“talk” therapy), or both. Everyone is different, and PTSD affects people differently, so a treatment that works for one person may not work for another. It is important for anyone with PTSD to be treated by a mental health provider who is experienced with PTSD. Some people with PTSD need to try different treatments to find what works with their symptoms. If someone with PTSD is going through an ongoing trauma, such as being in an abusive relationship, both problems need to be addressed. Other ongoing problems may include panic disorder, depression, substance abuse, and/or feeling suicidal.

**MEDICATION:** The most studied medications for treating PTSD include antidepressants, which may help control PTSD symptoms such as sadness, worry, anger, and feeling numb inside. Antidepressants and other medications may be prescribed along with psychotherapy. Doctors and patients can work together to find the best medication, or medication combination, as well as the right dose. Check the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)) for the latest information on patient medication guides, warnings, or newly approved medications.

**PSYCHOTHERAPY:** Many types of psychotherapy can help people with PTSD. Some types target the symptoms of PTSD directly. Other therapies focus on social, family, or job-related problems. Psychotherapy involves talking with a mental health professional to treat a mental illness. Psychotherapy may occur one-on-one or in a group. Talk therapy treatment for PTSD usually lasts 6 to 12 weeks, but it can last longer. Research shows that support from family and friends can be an important part of therapy. The doctor or therapist may combine different therapies depending on each person’s needs. Effective psychotherapies tend to emphasize a few key components, including education about symptoms, teaching skills to help identify the triggers of symptoms, and skills to manage the symptoms. One helpful form of therapy is called cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT. CBT can include exposure therapy and cognitive restructuring.

## FIND THE HELP YOU NEED BY CONTACTING :

- ◆ NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH ([WWW.NIMH.NIH.GOV](http://WWW.NIMH.NIH.GOV))
- ◆ ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA ([WWW.ADAA.ORG](http://WWW.ADAA.ORG))