

## SYMPTOMS OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

A person with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has experienced the threat of death or serious injury, been seriously injured, or been a witness to threatened or actual death or serious injury. The person's experience included intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Thus, this disorder is the result of injury, either physical or emotional. The four basic categories of symptoms are listed below with examples.

### Intrusive Symptoms

1. Thoughts, images, and perceptions about the trauma intrude into the person's consciousness over and over. Children may have repetitive play that expresses aspects of the trauma.
2. There are very vivid nightmares about the trauma that feel like a re-experiencing. Children may have frightening dreams that have generalized to monsters or other threats.
3. The person experiences flashbacks, or sudden vivid memories of the trauma, which seem very real, like the trauma is being re-experienced. These may include illusions and hallucinations as well. Children may reenact the trauma.
4. There are intense emotional outbursts of fear or anger that may appear to have no cause but which are triggered by external cues or internal cues that resemble some aspect of the trauma.
5. There are physical reactions that are triggered by cues resembling the trauma, such as throwing up, stomachaches, and numbness.

### Avoidance Symptoms

1. The person avoids thoughts, feelings, or conversations that remind her of the trauma.
2. The person avoids activities, places, or people that remind her of the trauma.
3. There is an inability to recall important details about the trauma.
4. There is a loss of interest in or lack of participation in activities that have been significant in the past.
5. The person feels different from others and very detached, possibly like there is something that separates them.

6. There is an inability to feel feelings or to express them, which leaves the impression of coldness or preoccupation.
7. There is a sense of doom and no expectation of a future in terms of achievement, happiness, or normal life transitions.

### Hyper-arousal Symptoms

1. The person acts as if the trauma is constantly threatening.
2. There is insomnia, difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep, often related to nightmares that terrify them.
3. There is great irritability or explosive emotional outbursts.
4. It is very difficult to concentrate.
5. The person is constantly on their guard or hyper-vigilant, surveying situations for possible danger.
6. There is an exaggerated startle response to occurrences that resemble aspects of the trauma, such as someone coming from behind.

### Associated Symptoms

1. There may be depression due to feeling out of touch with people and not in control of their experience.
2. There may be abuse of alcohol or other drugs in order to numb the person to their flashbacks, extreme loneliness, panic attacks, and related depression.
3. There may be poor impulse control.
4. There may be suicidal ideation and suicide risk.

PTSD can be acute (symptoms are present less than three months, chronic (three months or more), or delayed onset (occur at least six months after the trauma). A related diagnosis is Acute Stress Disorder, which is less than four weeks in duration.