

# Post-traumatic Stress (PTSD)

“Posttraumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) is an anxiety condition that can result from assaults or abuse, motor vehicle accidents, military combat, natural disasters, or from any situation that causes people to fear for their safety. Trauma survivors can be left with frightening beliefs that the world is unsafe and remain on-guard, constantly watching for signs of danger. Nightmares and memories or reminders of the original trauma can trigger intense anxiety and physical symptoms, including a racing heart, sweating, hyperventilation and, in some cases, flashbacks, where it feels as if the original trauma is occurring again right then and there. Because these symptoms are so uncomfortable, people with PTSD often try to suppress them through emotional numbing, withdrawing from other people and by avoiding of any place or situation that reminds them of the original trauma.

CBT is an effective treatment for the symptoms of PTSD because it deals directly with the avoidance-based coping that maintains problems and symptoms. Treatment often starts with education about how the body protects itself, so clients can begin to experience their arousal from a more logical perspective and with less fear. Other emotions, like guilt, shame and anger, that can also interfere with normal functioning are addressed as well. A technique called exposure forms a critical part of the treatment plan. In it the client and therapist work together to revisit specific aspects of the traumatic experience. They may decide to write a detailed story of the event or look at photos, or they may go to the actual location where the trauma occurred. Although this can be challenging for some clients it is a vital part of the healing process because the direct experience of allowing thoughts and feelings that had previously been avoided enables clients to realize that they can cope and begin to reclaim their lives.