



Caregiver Partners: Understanding and Healing the Wounds of PTSD Handout

Trauma vs. PTSD statistics

Between 50-90% of the general population has experienced a trauma but only 7-8% of the general population and 11-30 % of the Veteran population will have PTSD at some point in their lifetime. The experience of PTSD is not a new experience nor is it only a Veteran experience, but may be a caregiver's experience as well.

What constitutes a trauma? A trauma is an intrusive event or series of events that you personally witness or experience, such as a violent life-threatening event, a serious injury or accident, physical or sexual violence, profound neglect, or abuse in childhood, or witnessing abuse between parents. The trauma may be a onetime event or may result from multiple episodes. During these traumas, the individual becomes flooded with intense fear, horror, or helplessness.

What is complex trauma? Complex trauma typically has its origins in childhood and most often is the result of a parent or caregiver whose interactions with the child are physically or sexually abusive, profoundly neglectful, or when the child is exposed to ongoing family conflict or violence. Complex childhood trauma can be compounded by adult trauma such as combat deployments, intimate partner violence, or other traumatizing events.

What happens to an individual at the time of the trauma?

Humans are biologically engineered to respond to trauma with waves of stress hormones that create the energy needed to fight or flight. These hormones flood your system causing a state of intense alertness or arousal so that you are prepared to protect yourself. Your thoughts may be narrowly focused on survival and may not process clearly or have full recall of what happened. During a trauma, your emotions are not reflected upon, expressed, or processed as your energy and effort is devoted to managing the event and may result in shutting down emotions, emotional withdrawal, or becoming numb.

Why does PTSD make sense?

PTSD symptoms are not a sign of being broken. Just like when you get a sliver in your finger, it starts to get red, throbs, or infected. This is your body's natural alert system telling you "Hey there is something wrong here, pay attention, and get this sliver out of my finger." Similarly, PTSD symptoms are your natural psychological system trying to



get your attention to heal the injury by having it intrude on you in the present. It is alerting you psychologically “Hey something painful has happened here pay attention, it needs to be healed.” The symptoms of PTSD cause you to relive the trauma as if it was frozen in time. The symptoms are stuck in their original state until you are able to process them.

How do you heal from PTSD? - Process the trauma

- Reach out to others - Seek help and support
- Learn about PTSD, identify triggers, and plan coping strategies
- Fight the urge to avoid, hide, or isolate
- Push to face your fears at your pace
- Write, remember, share, and listen to your story
- Identify and express the feelings bound up in your story
- Learn to calm and soothe yourself
- Practice mindfulness meditation
- Find physical release for stress – Exercise
- Ground yourself in nature - Get outdoors
- Invest in your recovery and living your Life

Seek Help

VA PTSD Web site <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

VA PTSD Helpline 1-802-296-6300

VA Caregiver Support Web site <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

VA Caregiver Support Line # 1-855-260-3274