

101 of Understanding Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) & Trauma Recovery Options

When you say “trauma” what are you talking about?

I find it helpful to think of trauma as natural to human existence as the need to breathe. Across our lifetime traumatic events and situations will occur, and as mammals our nervous systems are naturally designed to attempt to warn, to avoid, and to brace for imminent danger. It gets a little more complicated at the top of the food chain because humans have a Neocortex, our advanced brain structures responsible for more complex memory, interpretation, and feeling abilities that try to reason the “why” of all events.

Any event, traumatic or otherwise, upon occurrence gets evaluated by our memory bank along the lines of: “How do I make sense of this event based on my current beliefs about the world and the people in it?” For example, if I experienced a car accident, my determination about my abilities to drive again would be connected to my history of driving interactions, my beliefs surrounding other drivers and road conditions , and my memories of how similar situations were handled by my childhood caregivers.

For many, a specific traumatic event can be treated as a “one off”; however, for 5-25% of the population who experience a traumatic event residual symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can and do occur.

PTSD is a clear indication that below the initial event or series of traumatic events themselves there is an existing belief that “the world and the people in it are unsafe and therefore I cannot feel safe now.” Due to the complexity of our Neocortex, this is rarely a conscious thought process. PTSD symptoms also indicate our physical bodies are storing “un-discharged” energy from the traumatic event(s) themselves, which can produce a multitude of physical sensations from numbness to heightened panic and disorientation.

Contrary to popular culture combat related PTSD represents a very small fraction of the people affected by Posttraumatic Stress Disorder globally. As discussed earlier, because posttraumatic stress reactions are largely based upon our previously held beliefs about the world and the people in it, not surprisingly developmental trauma appears to be a leading contributor and predictor for the future development of PTSD symptoms.

Developmental trauma can be defined as the experience of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and/or neglect in childhood. Experiencing any of these events, especially during a time in which world views are being formulated, will naturally interfere with our intrinsic feelings of personal safety needed to navigate this planet and coexist with other living beings.

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Signs and symptoms of PTSD

Often times we think that so much time has passed, that it has to have been enough time for my mind and body to heal. Truth is symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder can manifest months to years later, possibly even feeling suddenly triggered by a completely unrelated event. Unlike a broken limb where you can clearly see the affected area and treatment can be provided with isolated interventions, PTSD symptoms invade the mind, body, and soul; therefore, PTSD can affect everything from sleep, to emotional reactivity, to energy levels, to interpersonal relationships and intimacy, to sense of purpose on this planet.

Common PTSD symptoms reported include and are not limited to:

- Experiencing an intensity of emotions from feelings of rage, to numb, to feeling out of one's body
- Intrusive memories of past traumatic events while awake or sleeping
- Sense of impending doom and excessive worry for ourselves and those we love
- Need to be on alert, ever vigilant, and high startle response (i.e. our back needs to be facing a wall and having a clear line of sight to any building entry points)
- Increase in isolation behaviors and high disinterest in large gatherings of people (i.e. grocery stores during the daytime)
- Increase in emotional and physical fatigue
- Disinterest in previously enjoyed activities
- Difficulty with memory and concentration
- Feeling a lack of identity outside of the trauma or sense of purpose
- Chronic pain, stress, and auto-immune disease symptoms
- Thoughts of ending one's life to end or stop the pain

How do I find help for PTSD?

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The great news is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder can be treated and healed! Old practices of just learning to live with a level of symptoms because providers did not know how to treat trauma symptoms in both the mind and body are no longer the gold standard of care for PTSD.

First and foremost, trust your gut. If you or someone you love is struggling with unresolved or untreated PTSD see a trauma recovery provider immediately, time will not simply make these symptoms disappear it usually only complicates them.

Second, get informed. Research on PTSD is rampant right now and so are the new and innovative treatment advances. Researching options and making an informed decision about your help will increase your chances of seeing your recovery through. While the symptoms of PTSD can be terrifying so can the idea to having to talk about them to another person. Pairing with a provider that is both knowledgeable and supports your autonomy in treatment is critical in any healing setting.

Since Posttraumatic Stress Disorder runs the gamut of physical, emotional, and spiritual symptoms traditional approaches of talk and exposure therapy alone are not the most favorable treatment options, and still unfortunately widely practiced in the mental health community. This is in a large part because research on PTSD and understanding PTSD symptoms has really only come online over the last 35 years, so it's a relatively new treatment field in Western cultures. Some speculate we still might only know about 10-20% of the brain and body's capacity to heal, so PTSD treatment will be an ever evolving field for some time to come.

Currently the most favorable healing outcomes for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder are approaches that work to align both mind and body, creating an integrative approach utilizing both Eastern and Western healing techniques. PTSD recovery can occur in a group or individual therapy settings with trained trauma recovery providers. Often collaboration with and use of psychiatry services can significantly assist with symptom reduction within the first 30 days of treatment, especially to address the immediate concerns pertaining to intensity of depression, panic, and lack of undisrupted sleep symptoms.

Enlightened Vibrations is proud to offer cutting edge and evidence-based integrative trauma and PTSD recovery services in a safe and accessible setting. Starting with an initial phone screen to explore your treatment options at no cost is a service we are happy to offer you and/or your loved one. We look forward to assisting you and/or your loved one on their healing path, call us today at 619.642.2508 or info@enlightenedvibrations.com.

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