

What Is PTSD?

PTSD stands for “posttraumatic stress disorder”—a set of emotional problems that can occur after someone has experienced a terrible, stressful life event.

PTSD means:	“post	traumatic	stress	disorder”
	↓	↓	↓	↓
	“after”	“trauma”	“anxiety”	“reaction”

★ *Do you have PTSD? Check off (✓) those below that are true for you.*

1. You survived a *trauma*: an event outside of your control in which you experienced or witnessed a physical threat (e.g., sexual abuse, physical abuse, war combat, seeing someone killed, surviving a hurricane, a car accident).
2. Your *response* to the trauma involved intense helplessness, fear, or horror (or, if you were a child at the time, agitated or disorganized behavior).
3. After the trauma, you suffered *each of the following problems* for over a month:
 - ✦ **INTRUSION**: The trauma comes back into mind even when you don’t want it to, as in nightmares, flashbacks, or images.
 - ✦ **AVOIDANCE**: Numbing, feeling detached, avoiding any reminders of the trauma.
 - ✦ **AROUSAL**: Feeling “hyped up” (e.g., easily startled, sleep problems, anger).
 - ✦ **LOWER FUNCTIONING**: Problems with relationships, work, or other major areas of life.

Note: You have PTSD if you checked off all of the items above.

TYPES OF PTSD

There are two types of PTSD. “Simple PTSD” is from a single incident (such as a car accident or a tornado), usually as an adult. “Complex PTSD” is from repeated incidents such as domestic violence or ongoing childhood abuse. It has a broader range of symptoms, including problems with self-harm, suicide, dissociation (“losing time”), relationships, memory, sexuality, health, anger, shame, guilt, numbness, loss of faith and trust, and feeling damaged.

MORE ABOUT PTSD ...

* **Your PTSD symptoms are normal after what you have been through.** You are not crazy, weak, or bad! That is why PTSD has been called “a normal reaction to abnormal events.”

* **PTSD is considered an anxiety disorder** because it is marked by an overwhelming feeling of anxiety during or after the trauma. It is a psychiatric illness, but it is definitely possible to heal from it.

* **Rates of PTSD:** 61% of men experience trauma during their lives, with 5% developing PTSD; for women, 51% experience trauma, and 10% develop PTSD. Why do some people develop PTSD after trauma and others don’t? This is not fully known, but some risk factors include more severe, repeated, and/or early trauma; poverty; parents who had PTSD; and life stress.

* **Knowledge about PTSD is relatively recent.** It was first studied in soldiers who experienced combat. Later, it came to be understood in a wide variety of terrible life events (e.g., sexual and physical abuse, natural disasters). PTSD was added to the official list of psychiatric disorders only in 1980. More is being learned all the time because it is so important.

* **It is possible to heal from severe trauma.** Some famous people who have include Oprah Winfrey (TV personality), Melanie Griffith (actress), and Maya Angelou (writer).