



Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to a traumatic event. The sufferer may have directly experienced the event, witnessed it, or simply learned about the event happening to someone close to them. Traumatic events may involve military combat, violent personal assault, kidnapping, terrorism, vehicular accidents, natural or manmade disasters, and being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. The sufferer's typical response to the event is intense fear, helplessness or horror. The symptoms of PTSD cause significant distress and impairment of functioning, and last longer than one month in duration. PTSD is also commonly accompanied by other psychiatric conditions such as depression, alcohol/substance abuse, panic disorder and other anxiety disorders.

Persistent Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- The re-experiencing of the traumatic event in the form of nightmares and intrusive recollections of the event.
- The avoidance of anything associated with the traumatic event. This may include thoughts, feelings, activities, situations, people or conversations.
- The numbing of general responsiveness to the external world. Examples include a lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities, feeling detached from other people, and a reduced ability to feel emotions.
- Increased arousal. This symptom may manifest itself in sleep disturbances, hyper-vigilance, an exaggerated startle response, irritability, anger, and lack of concentration.
- A sense of foreshortened future (the sufferer does not expect to have a normal life-span).

Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is an extremely treatable problem. The most common treatment approaches involve a combination of:

- Education of the sufferer and their family members.
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (including exposure therapy in a safe, controlled context).
- Medication to reduce the anxiety, depression and sleep problems frequently associated with PTSD.
- Support from family, friends and peers.