

## What is PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a serious and common condition that affects up to 20 percent of American adults. While we may feel like we should be able to carry on with life, sometimes traumatic memories become so disabling that we can no longer cope or function.

At least 70 percent of adults have experienced a traumatic event in their lives. The reasons that some people develop PTSD while others do not are currently being studied. They include biological, psychological, and social factors. For those who do develop PTSD, highly distressing memories do not fade away. This ongoing stress can cause a person to feel intense fear, helplessness, or horror that impairs their long-term emotional, mental, and physical well-being.

The individuals who are at greatest risk for developing PTSD include survivors of domestic or physical violence (including sexual assault or physical assault such as mugging or carjacking); survivors of unexpected every day events (including accidents, fires, and natural disasters); abused children; combat veterans; and professionals who respond to victims in trauma situations (such as police and firefighters).

Most health insurance policies cover the service of MFTs so long as the services are “medically necessary.” This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.



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# WHEN BAD MEMORIES WON'T GO AWAY:

Help for Post-Traumatic  
Stress Disorder (PTSD)



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California Association of  
Marriage and Family Therapists



## HOW IS PTSD DIAGNOSED?

While PTSD symptoms often appear within a few weeks of the trauma, some people don't experience them until months or years later. A diagnosis of PTSD can be made if symptoms from each of the three "clusters" (see below) have been present for more than one month or are causing severe problems or distress in daily life.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

There are three categories or "clusters" of symptoms associated with PTSD:

- Re-experiencing symptoms—living the event through recurring nightmares or other images that intrude at any time. PTSD sufferers may have heart palpitations or panic when faced with reminders of the event.
- Avoidance and numbing symptoms—Avoiding reminders of the event, including places, people, or associated thoughts. People with PTSD may withdraw emotionally from friends and family and lose interest in every day activities.
- Arousal symptoms—including sudden anger or irritability, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, or being easily startled.

PTSD can affect all five senses: sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing. It can also occur with depression, anxiety, or substance abuse. If you or someone you love has PTSD, remember that help is available. PTSD is treatable.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- **Use positive self-talk in stressful situations.** When you become aware of your stress response, remind yourself you can leave if you need to. You can make different choices now than you could when the trauma happened.
- **De-sensitize yourself to stressors.** If you feel anxious, give yourself permission to reduce the anxiety. Allow yourself to feel the anxiety for one minute and then leave. By building up your tolerance, you will de-sensitize while still feeling in control of the situation.
- **Tell friends and family how to support you.** PTSD affects the whole family. Learn how to understand and share your feelings about the trauma.
- **Recognize when you need help.** Many PTSD sufferers think they should be able to "handle it" or "get over it" alone. You may feel guilty or isolated. If symptoms aren't going away, reach out for help. Treatment works.
- **Find the right therapist.** Look for a therapist with training and experience in treating PTSD as well as someone who is warm, supportive, and goal-oriented. Use short telephone interviews to shop for a good fit with potential therapists. Ask about availability, fees, if they accept your health insurance, and how they approach problems like yours.

## OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of California, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of over 29000 mental health professionals. CAMFT is dedicated to advancing marriage and family therapy as a healing art, science, and mental health profession. In fact, CAMFT sponsors TherapistFinder.com™ so Californians can gain access to qualified local experts who can help.



Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Always ask about a therapist's special areas of expertise (e.g. grief counseling, children's issues, relationship counseling) before you engage in therapy to ensure it's the right fit for you.

TherapistFinder™ is a California-wide interactive, online directory that is user-friendly and searchable by name, location, and area of expertise. It's your introduction to one or more qualified psychotherapists who hold a California license.

