



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# PTSD: National Center for PTSD

## What is PTSD?

### PTSD Basics

It's normal to have upsetting memories, feel on edge, or have trouble sleeping after a traumatic event. At first, it may be hard to do normal daily activities, like go to work, go to school, or spend time with people you care about. But most people start to feel better after a few weeks or months.

If it's been longer than a few months and you're still having symptoms, you may have PTSD. For some people, PTSD symptoms may start later on, or they may come and go over time. See [PTSD Basics](#) to learn more.

### More PTSD Topics

- [Avoidance](#)  
Avoidance is a common reaction to trauma. It is natural to want to avoid thinking about or feeling emotions about a stressful event. But when avoidance is extreme, or when it's the main way you cope, it can interfere with your emotional recovery and healing.
- [Trauma Reminders: Anniversaries](#)  
On the anniversary of a traumatic event, some survivors have an increase in distress. These "anniversary reactions" can range from feeling mildly upset for a day or two to a more extreme reaction with more severe mental health or medical symptoms.
- [Trauma Reminders: Triggers](#)  
People respond to traumatic events in a number of ways, such as feelings of concern, anger, fear, or helplessness. Research shows that people who have been through trauma, loss, or hardship in the past may be even more likely than others to be affected by new, potentially traumatic events.
- [Aging Veterans and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms](#)  
For many Veterans, memories of their wartime experiences can still be upsetting long after they served in combat. Even if they served many years ago, military experience can still affect the lives of Veterans today.
- [Very Young Trauma Survivors](#)  
Trauma and abuse can have grave impact on the very young. The attachment or bond between a child and parent matters as a young child grows. This bond can make a difference in how a child responds to trauma.
- [PTSD in Children and Teens](#)  
Trauma affects school-aged children and teenagers differently than adults. If diagnosed with PTSD, the symptoms in children and teens can also look different. For many children, PTSD symptoms go away on their own after a few months. Yet some children show symptoms for years if they do not get treatment. There are many treatment options available including talk and play therapy.

- [History of PTSD in Veterans: Civil War to DSM-5](#)  
PTSD became a diagnosis with influence from a number of social movements, such as Veteran, feminist, and Holocaust survivor advocacy groups. Research about Veterans returning from combat was a critical piece to the creation of the diagnosis. So, the history of what is now known as PTSD often references combat history.