**POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

**TREATMENT**

It is important to be gentle on yourself and give yourself time to get better. Having lived through a trauma stresses both the mind and body. A person who has gone through a trauma cannot expect to behave and act as they normally do straight after the trauma. It is not a good idea to make important decisions directly following a trauma.

**COUNSELLING AND DEBRIEFING**

Trauma counselling and debriefing is a good way of coping with the experience. You can go for individual or group therapy sessions where you can talk through the experience and work through the painful feeling such as anger, sadness and guilt. You can find good ways to coping with the symptoms.

**STEPS TO RECOVERY**

- Remember that the symptoms are part of the trauma – they will pass eventually.
- Feelings of guilt are normal – it’s part of taking back your life.
- Speak to a counsellor to help you cope with these feelings.
- Talk about your experience in detail – your thoughts, feelings and fears. Tell people you are close to that you want to talk about it.
- Take control of your life as soon as possible. Avoid going on leave, and don’t make any extreme life changes – it is best to face your fears and feelings rather than avoid them.
- Slowly get back to your normal habits. Do what you normally do – if you find this difficult, get the support of family and friends. It is important not to push yourself too hard, take things slowly.
- Understand this is a process – you will get better but it takes time.
- Your family and friends may also be struggling with what you’ve been through. Talk about it with them, and be there for each other.

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**DEPRESSION (Cont.)**

- Trouble sleeping - or sleeping too little or too much
- Eating too much or not eating
- No energy, feeling tired, being “slowed down”
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Physical symptoms like headaches, digestive disorders, and pain that don’t get better with treatment

**PANIC DISORDER**

Often people with PTSD suffer panic attacks, resulting from extreme fear they felt during the traumatic event. During their attack; their throats tighten, while their breathing and heart rate increase, making them feel nauseous and dizzy. When they are exposed to places, smells, sounds, or people that remind them of the trauma, or when they have memories or flashbacks of the incident, they often have panic attacks.

**PANIC ATTACK**

- Being very frightened and terrified
- Racing or pounding heartbeat
- Chest pains
- Dizziness, light-headedness
- Nausea (feeling like you want to vomit)
- Difficulty breathing
- Tingling in the hands and fingers
- Feeling very hot or feeling cold
- Fear of losing control, going “crazy” or mad, or doing something embarrassing
- Fear of dying

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If you are like many South Africans, you may have been the victim of crime; violence; illness, or been involved in an accident. You may also be suffering from a very real condition - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

Many South African victims of trauma do not receive the help they need. Seeing a lot of violence, refusing to accept what has happened, feeling embarrassed or scared, and thinking we must all ‘be brave’ stops most South Africans getting help for this treatable condition.
POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

WHAT IS TRAUMA?
Experiences that are sudden, unexpected, or that threaten our lives or safety. When we experience a traumatic incident, we are also emotionally hurt - we feel helpless, scared, angry, or guilty.

CAUSES OF TRAUMA
Anyone who has gone through a traumatic event, or has even witnessed something traumatic, can be affected. There are many different events that can cause someone to react badly:
- Accident – car, work, home
- Hijacking, smash & grab
- Work-related stress
- Domestic violence
- Having a life-threatening illness like cancer or AIDS
- Going through or seeing violence often
- Death of a loved one
- Robbery
- Natural disaster
- Unemployment
- Divorce, break up
- Assault or abuse

COMMON FEELINGS AFTER A TRAUMATIC EVENT
Most people feel certain things after a traumatic event. Normal symptoms and reactions include:
- Nightmares
- Sleeping difficulties
- Changes in appetite
- Anxiety and fear
- Feeling irritable, agitated or angry
- Very aware and ready to act
- No energy, feeling tired all the time
- Feeling depressed/sad mood, crying a lot of the time
- Avoiding people, places and things that remind you of the event
- Not being able to concentrate on work or normal, everyday actions
- Feeling worried about the safety of the people that you love.
- For most people, these symptoms get less and go away after a couple of weeks. However, if they continue for 6 weeks or longer, it may be PTSD.

WHO CAN GET PTSD?
Any traumatic event can cause PTSD and anyone who has experienced a trauma may suffer from PTSD.

CAUSES OF PTSD AND ANXIETY.
False – PTSD is different from normal anxiety.

WHO CAN GET PTSD?
Not all people who have been through a trauma will develop PTSD or need treatment, some get better with the help of family, friends or other support. But many people need professional help to recover.

Children can also get PTSD. Domestic violence and abuse, the loss of a parent or loved one, war, and natural disasters impact on the lives of children.

SYMPTOMS OF PTSD
PTSD usually appears within three months of the trauma, but sometimes it may come on months or even years later. There are three groups of PTSD symptoms: intrusive symptoms, avoidance symptoms, and symptoms of hyper-arousal.

INTRUSIVE SYMPTOMS: People suffering from PTSD may have times when memories of the traumatic event ‘take over’ their lives - when they have sudden, very realistic images and painful emotions of the traumatic event.

FLASHBACKS: A memory so powerful, the person feels as if the trauma is happening all over again – it is a common symptom of trauma and PTSD. At times, the re-experiencing occurs in nightmares that are so real that the person wakes up screaming in terror. In children, dreams of the traumatic event are often nightmares of scary animals, or danger to people they love like friends and family.

AVOIDANCE SYMPTOMS: PTSD sufferers often stay away from situations that may remind them of the traumatic event. A hijack victim, for example, may find it extremely frightening to drive. Over time, the person may become so scared of particular situations that his or her daily life is affected by them trying to avoid these situations.

These also affect a person’s relationships with other people, because he or she will try and stay away from having a close emotional relationship with family, friends and colleagues.

HYPER-AROUSAL SYMPTOMS: PTSD can cause sufferers to act as though they are still threatened by the trauma that caused their illness. Sufferers often become irritable, and may have trouble concentrating or remembering things. They often get insomnia which is difficulty sleeping. PTSD sufferers get frights easily – if they hear a car backfire or a fire cracker, they get very scared and hide for cover.

GUILT: Trauma includes loss and many people can’t cope with the guilt that they caused the incident or that they should have somehow stopped the trauma from happening. If there was a death during the incident, survivors often feel guilty that they lived when others didn’t.

It is very important to understand that these feelings are normal and to get counselling as soon as possible.

EFFECTS OF PTSD AND RELATED PROBLEMS
PTSD is negative for both the sufferer and his or her family.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE: Many people suffering from PTSD try get rid of painful memories, loneliness and nervousness by using alcohol or other drugs as a form of self-medication. Substance abuse helps to take away feeling and memories for a little while.

SUICIDE: A person with PTSD may feel their pain will never end. People with PTSD can be at risk of suicide.

DEPRESSION: Many PTSD sufferers can’t get over the grief and anger after the injury or loss, and this can cause depression as the person begins to see him or herself as worthless and a failure. The symptoms of depression – like not being able to think properly, the negative views of the world, and the changes in sleeping habits – all make PTSD worse.

DEPRESSION:
- Feeling sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex