What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a condition that can sometimes occur after exposure to a traumatic event. It is normal for most individuals to experience some form of distress after highly traumatic events and the majority will return to normal functioning in a short period of time without intervention. However, for a small number of individuals, long term and incapacitating problems develop. In such cases, the earlier assistance is sought, the better the recovery rate.

What is a traumatic event?

The definition of a ‘trauma’ is different for everyone; however there are a number of specific events that have the potential to cause significant distress. These include but are not limited to:

- threat of death or serious injury
- serious injury to self
- viewing or handling of dead bodies
- death or serious injury of a family member, close friend, or colleague
- exposure to a potentially contagious disease or toxic agent
- witnessing a horrifying event
- witnessing human degradation on a large scale
- an action or inaction resulting in the serious injury or death of others.

What is a normal reaction?

Most people experience strong reactions after traumatic events. These may include:

- re-experiencing the event, such as having mental or visual images and/or dreams about the event
- intrusive thoughts about the event
- a desire to avoid anything attached to the event, or avoiding thinking and talking about the event
- feelings of panic or being highly anxious, especially in situations that are associated with or remind you of the event
- feeling sad, tearful, hopeless or depressed and wanting to be on your own more than usual
- feelings of guilt or anger
- feeling unable to control your moods, especially your anger
- feeling your personality has changed
- drinking more alcohol, or misusing other substances
- trouble concentrating, disorientation, and memory problems
- sleep disturbance, excessive alertness, or being easily startled
- having difficulties with relationships.
How do I know if I should seek help?

If the symptoms mentioned above persist for more than 3 – 4 weeks and are causing you considerable distress and impacting on your ability to function at work or socially, you need to seek help. You do not have to go through this alone and there is help available. The sooner you seek help, the more likely you are to reach a full recovery.

Self-help resources are available for you to obtain more information. These include:


You may also wish to discuss things with a close friend or family member who you trust to be supportive. Sometimes it can really help to share a problem and get a different perspective on it by talking it over.

Where to seek help

In an emergency situation, call 000.

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support. You can also contact your local ADF Health Centre, Chaplain, Social Worker, Mental Health Professional, or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on 1800 628 036 or if calling from overseas +61 2 9425 3878.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call 1800 IMSICK to locate the nearest support.

Other Mental Health Resources

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608)
www.defence.gov.au/dco

The Defence Family Helpline is your first point of call for support, information and connection with your community. The Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

You can also email the Helpline on DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au and receive a response within 24 hours.

Chaplains are connected to all units in Australia and can provide support and appropriate referrals.

LifeLine (131 114). If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call LifeLine for the cost of a local call.

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS). This 24-hour service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families on 1800 011 046.