

ADF MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

TRAUMATIC STRESS



JOINT HEALTH COMMAND
VICE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE



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 some people, long term and incapacitating problems develop.

What is a traumatic event?

Traumatic events involve situations that are either life-threatening or have the potential for serious injury.

These include but are not limited to:

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

What are common reactions?

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

- re-living the event through unwanted and recurring memories or vivid nightmares
- 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 2 weeks and are causing you considerable distress and impacting on your ability to function at work, at home and/or socially, you need to seek help. You do not have to go through this alone and there is help available.

Seeking assistance early is important, however, treatments for PTSD can work even if your traumatic experience was some time ago, or if you have been through several different traumatic events.

Where to seek help

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support. You can also contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional, Chaplain 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.

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

The **ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal**
www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

The Portal is an online health information resource tool for all current and ex-serving ADF Members and their families.

Other 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.

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