

*Patient Education Sheet***What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?****What is post traumatic stress disorder?**

Post traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder. It develops after exposure to a trauma, or very painful or terrifying experience. It can affect anyone, at any age. After trauma, many survivors feel that their lives have changed. After a traumatic experience, the world seems to change for them from a safe place to one that may seem dangerous and unpredictable.

Who is at risk for post traumatic stress disorder?

An estimated 5.2 million American adults between the ages of 18 and 54 have post traumatic stress disorder. More women than men have this disorder. Others include:

- Military personnel
- Emergency responders, such as emergency medical technicians and police officers
- Victims of crimes, the witnesses and family members of the victims

It can also affect survivors of events such as:

- War
- Terrorists attacks
- Sudden unexpected death of a loved one due to suicide or a violent crime
- Physical, sexual assault or rape
- Kidnapping or torture
- Natural disaster, such as tornado or hurricane
- Escape from a violent country

How do I know if someone has post traumatic stress disorder?

Children who are/were victims of physical or sexual abuse, or witnessed a parent's death, may feel deserving of their punishment, betrayed by the people they love, abandoned or rejected. They may relive the event through play activities, have tantrums, show separation anxiety, may thumb suck and/or wet the bed.

Adult survivors with post traumatic stress disorder often experience the following:

- Flashbacks – episodes of re-experiencing the trauma. They often cannot stop reliving the traumatic episode in their minds, or they are unable to predict when such memories will return.
- Nightmares – recurring dreams in which the person may recall the trauma during sleep.
- Physical symptoms – headache, nausea, stomach pain and chest pain, immune system disorders, and dizziness. Physicians often treat these symptoms without connecting the symptoms with a traumatic event.
- Anxiety symptoms – depression, irritability, anger or outbursts, intense feelings of guilt, difficulty concentrating, or jumpiness.

Those with post traumatic stress disorder no longer enjoy being with family and friends. They try to avoid people, places or situations that could be reminders of the traumatic experience. They may be afraid to fall asleep due to nightmares, and thus suffer from insomnia. Some are unable to relax and are constantly on the lookout for danger, or “on guard.” Some may even have constant thoughts of revenge or may even have difficulty separating from the abuser. Post traumatic stress disorder survivors may also abuse alcohol or drugs.

Can post traumatic stress disorder be treated?

Post traumatic stress disorder can be successfully treated. Survivors can resolve problems with the help of a psychiatrist or other mental health specialist. Treatment may include individual or behavioral therapy, family therapy or group therapy depending upon the situation. The psychiatrist may prescribe medication to treat depression, insomnia and/or anxiety.

Danbury Hospital has a Crisis Intervention Hotline that anyone can call with any mental health questions. The phone number is (203)739-7007.

Sources:

Connecticut Clearinghouse, Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Retrieved April 2009 from www.ctclearinghouse.org

National Library of Medicine. (2001). Trauma-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Retrieved April 2009 from www.nlm.nih.gov

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