

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



0800 21 22 23

(8am to 8pm)

0800 567 567

(24 hours)

Trauma Line 0800 20 50 26

(8am to 8pm)



Netcare Foundation
Changing lives

Many South Africans have fallen victim to crime, violence, illness or other trauma, and many are exposed to frequent traumas. Sadly, most trauma victims do not receive the support and help they need. Because South Africans experience so much trauma, many people believe it's important to 'be brave' and 'not complain'.

The feelings and responses after a trauma are totally normal but not talking about what you've experienced or how you are really feeling can result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD is a very real condition. There is help available.

www.sadag.org

What is Trauma?

Any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and afraid for your life or safety is traumatic. Traumatic experiences shatter expectations of safety and controllability, and hurt us emotionally. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to feel traumatised.

Myth

Only Weak People Are Unable To Cope With Trauma

False. Anyone who has experienced a trauma will be affected physically and emotionally, including children.

Myth

Anyone Who Has Been Through Trauma Has PTSD

False. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not the same as normal post-traumatic anxiety. It negatively affects daily life and develops over time.

Myth

You Can Only Be Traumatized If You Have Been Directly Involved

False. Witnessing a traumatic event like domestic violence or an accident, or watching a traumatic event on TV or social media, can cause anxiety and can result in PTSD.

Causes Of Trauma

Causes can be natural or man-made and can be one-time events or be ongoing:

- Accident – car, work, home
- Hijacking, Smash & Grab
- House robbery, mugging
- Domestic Violence
- Bullying
- Living in a crime-ridden neighbourhood or violent house
- Constant or repetitive witnessing of crime, violence, abuse
- Life-threatening illness
- Unemployment
- Surgery (particularly in the first 3 years of life)
- Death of a loved one
- Breakup of a significant relationship
- Natural disasters



NOTE: Anything that disrupts a child's sense of security can cause serious traumatic reactions and can result in PTSD later in life - an unstable environment, separation from a parent, illness, intrusive medical procedures, abuse and neglect.

Common Feelings after a traumatic event

Most people feel certain things after a traumatic event

Normal symptoms and reactions include:

- Nightmares
- Sleeping difficulties
- Change 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.

Guilt

Trauma survivors often feel guilty and undeserving of counselling, support or help.

- Survivors often feel that they 'caused' the event or that they should have prevented it.
Example: Rape, Domestic Violence
- Surviving when others didn't is an added trauma.
Example: Car accident

Treatment

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 important to be gentle on yourself and give yourself time to get better.

Debriefing: This is short-term counselling (1 or 2 sessions) within a week after the traumatic event. The counsellor or de-briefer will take you through what happened and how you felt.

Trauma Counselling: Trauma therapy aims to empower survivors and helps them regain a sense of security, safety, trust and self-worth.

Medication: If symptoms persist and are negatively impacting your daily life and functioning, it is very important to see your GP for a full assessment and possible medication.

Symptoms Of Trauma

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to think, feel, or respond, so don’t judge your own reactions or those of other people.

There are 3 basic symptom clusters that are common after a trauma. Usually these feelings and reactions ease over time but with PTSD, they continue for months, or even years.

Intrusive Symptoms - disturbing memories that interfere in your life

Hyper-Arousal - feeling very jumpy, nervous, and over-reacting to things like loud noises

Avoidance Symptoms - staying away from places, people, things that remind you of the trauma

Intrusive Symptoms

These are times when memories of the trauma ‘take over’ and the person re-experiences the event:

- ✓ Constant thoughts or memories of the trauma
- ✓ Flashbacks while awake
- ✓ Distressing dreams and nightmares
- ✓ Feeling like you have no control over memories of the trauma – they just appear at any time and you can’t make them stop

Hyper-Arousal Symptoms

After a trauma, and with PTSD, it feels like the threat is still present and very real:

- ✓ Startled or scared by loud noises and sudden movements
- ✓ Feeling nervous and jumpy
- ✓ Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- ✓ Irritability or outbursts of anger
- ✓ Difficulty concentrating
- ✓ Hyper-vigilance – being very aware of things around you like street sellers if you’ve been hijacked

Avoidance Symptoms

Trauma survivors often stay away from people, places or things that remind them of the incident. Over time this avoidance can severely affect daily life. It also negatively affects a survivor’s relationships with family, friends and colleagues:

- ✓ Avoiding people, places or things that remind you of the event – not listening to the same music, changing travelling routes, not wearing the same perfume
- ✓ Not talking about how you feel or what happened
- ✓ Feeling numb, not really responding to other people
- ✓ Feeling disconnected from other people
- ✓ Self-medication: drugs, alcohol, smoking

Self-Help For Trauma

Trauma disrupts your body's natural balance and survivors of trauma become 'frozen' in a state of hyper-arousal and fear. Remember that the symptoms you are experiencing are part of the trauma process – give yourself time to heal.

Healing from trauma is a process:

- ✔ It is natural to want to run away or hide from what happened. It's important not to make any
- ✔ big decisions after a traumatic event like quitting your job or moving house.
- ✔ Take back the control in your life by getting back to your normal habits and routines sooner rather than later.
- ✔ Talk about your experience in detail – what happened, when, how you felt, what you saw, what you felt, how you felt, what you feared.
- ✔ If possible, talk to your family & friends. Allow them to give you support. Remember they may also be struggling with what you have been through & may not know how to help you.
- ✔ Take one day at a time – there will be good days and days that are more challenging. Be mindful of how you are feeling and what you are thinking.
- ✔ Start moving – hum, sing, do some exercise, dance – it helps your body to relax and your mind to feel less threatened.
- ✔ Connect with the world around you: talk to someone, play with a child, pet an animal, walk barefoot, or write out how you feel in a journal or notebook.

There is help available



No one can predict how they will respond to adversity or tragedy. There is no right or wrong way to react to a traumatic situation. Trauma changes you and no-one can 'just get over it'. There is support, and there is help.

Effects of Emotional / Psychological Trauma



**Terrifying memories,
nightmares &
flashbacks**



PTSD



**Using
alcohol / drugs
to feel better**



**Disconnecting
from others**

Effects of PTSD & related problems

Substance Abuse Many people suffering from PTSD try to 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 feelings 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 Being unable to move past the pain, anger and grief of trauma can cause depression. The negative symptoms of depression (listed below) make dealing with a trauma harder:

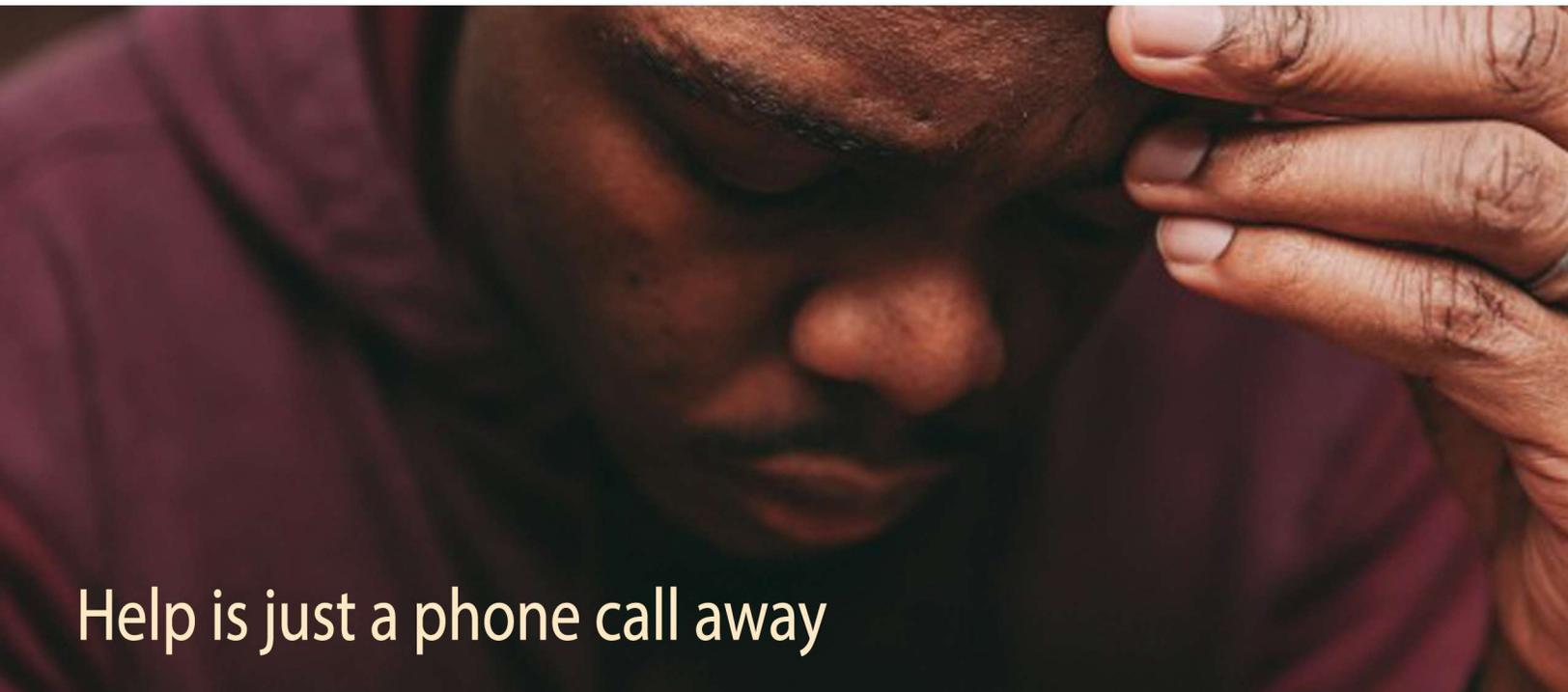
- Feeling sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too little or too much
- Eating too much or not eating
- No 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

Contact SADAG

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Help is just a phone call away