

# MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

## TRAUMA

### fear, courage and coping

Life is rarely like the movies or T.V. People in movies and on T.V. are portrayed as unafraid, calm and collected when faced with violence, danger or disaster. They are able to display superhuman strength, coordination or intelligence under extreme pressure, all while cracking

“YOU NEVER KNOW HOW STRONG YOU ARE, UNTIL BEING STRONG IS THE ONLY CHOICE YOU HAVE” -BOB MARLEY

jokes and maintaining flawless hair and skin. In reality, when people are faced with traumatic, life threatening situations our reactions are much different. Individuals process and deal with these events in diverse ways. People also recover and heal from these events in various ways and at their own pace. There are times, however, when people are unable to successfully cope with trauma and develop a disorder called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**Type of Events that can cause PTSD** Typically an event that can cause PTSD is one where there is a risk to your life or the life of someone you love. This includes car accidents, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, school shootings or violence in your community. Events like a friend or family member’s suicide or domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse may also cause PTSD. The majority of people who experience these types of events are able to successfully cope and move on. However, others are not. This can be due to several factors, including the severity of the trauma, the amount of support from family and friends, how you feel about your reaction or role in the event. The symptoms of PTSD are listed in the box below. They are similar for adults and teens. Teens however, do tend to have increased impulsivity, and aggression. The use of drugs and alcohol can also begin or increase. This is usually an attempt to cope with the symptoms.

## SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

Must be present for at least 1 month and interfere with functioning

- 1 re-experiencing symptoms (flashbacks, nightmares, negative thoughts)
- 1 avoidance symptom (avoiding thoughts, feelings, places or objects associated with traumatic event)
- 2 arousal/reactivity symptoms (easily startled, trouble sleeping, anger outbursts)
- 2 mood/cognition symptoms (negative thoughts about yourself, or the world, displaced guilt or blame)

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**Treatment for PTSD:** Like with many mental health issues, psychotherapy is an effective way to treat PTSD. It is beneficial to meet with a professional therapist to address your memories of the traumatic event and learn new ways to understand your reactions and coping skills. Sometimes therapists will work with you to control your fears and learn to cope with them better. For others, therapy may focus on the negative thoughts that are associated with the event and addressing any unrealistic expectations of what happened or misplaced guilt or blame. Medication may also be recommended to address the depression and anxiety symptoms. Some people also find it beneficial to attend group therapy sessions and work with other people who are dealing with PTSD. These types of treatments are often successful at

addressing symptoms and helping people cope and move on with their lives.

**What can I do if I have PTSD:** Often the first and most important step is to seek the help of a professional therapist and begin formal treatment. In addition to this, you can also be open and honest with trusted family members and friends about what you are experiencing. Pinpoint comforting places, people and activities and engage in these things on a regular basis. Take care of yourself by eating well and exercising. Make sure you have realistic expectations for yourself. Be gentle with yourself. The healing process takes time, give yourself permission to take the time you need. Avoid drugs or alcohol to numb feelings. This will only further complicate your symptoms and could lead to addiction.

“ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS WAS LEARNING I WAS WORTH RECOVERY” -DEMI LAVATO