

what is

post traumatic stress disorder?

People respond to traumatic events in different ways. Not all people that experience trauma will experience PTSD – this depends on the individual, their past experiences, levels of support and the nature of the event.

Is trauma normal?

What happens after traumatic events are normal responses to 'not normal' events. Most people affected by traumatic events are able to learn ways to manage, but additional support may be needed. It's important to remember that there is no 'right' way to respond.

Reaching out for support whenever needed can help make things easier to manage.

What is a traumatic experience?

A traumatic experience(s) is something that threatens a person's life, safety or the lives of people around them. It's an experience that's stressful and has a significant impact on their emotional state and overwhelms their usual coping skills.

A traumatic experience might be a natural disaster or a personal traumatic event to you or someone else.

Experiencing a trauma might leave someone with questions about safety and control over their life. It can be especially difficult to deal with these feelings if they're also dealing with other changes in their life, like getting a job, managing relationships or moving house.

 **Up to 57% of Australians experience trauma at some stage in their lives.**

What can be the effects of trauma?

It's normal to experience strong emotions after trauma. These can include:

- **emotional numbness and detachment** – feeling cut off from what happened, other people, and yourself
- **shock and disbelief** – that the event happened
- **fear** – of death or injury, being alone, not being able to cope, or the event happening again
- **helplessness** – feeling that you have no control
- **avoidance** – of things that remind you of the event
- **negative thoughts or feelings** – about the world or the reaction to the event
- **guilt or shame** – for not having stopped the event, or for being better off than others, or for not reacting better or coping well enough
- **sadness** – for things that have gone or been lost
- **isolation** – feeling that nobody understands or can help
- **joy** – relief at being alive and safe
- **anger and frustration** – about the event, or the unfairness of it
- **re-experiencing the event** – through dreams, flashbacks or thoughts
- **changes in relationships** – feeling distant from others.

Other experiences can include:

- headaches
- changes in appetite and weight
- racing heart
- shaking or sweating
- trouble sleeping
- difficulty concentrating
- emotional changes, like mood swings, anxiety, or a quick temper
- difficulty with school or work
- withdrawal from friends and family
- problems keeping up with normal daily activities
- risk-taking, including increased use of alcohol and other drugs
- being overly alert or watchful.

What is PTSD?

Most people begin to recover from a traumatic experience in the following few weeks. But some people have continuing symptoms of distress, or find that their symptoms are getting worse. This may be PTSD.

Some of the signs of PTSD include:

- reminders of the traumatic event that are distressing. These could include: dreams, flashbacks, thoughts or memories of the event coming back unexpectedly, physiological reactions that remind you of the event
- avoiding things that remind you of the event. This can include avoiding specific people, places, or events. It can also include efforts to avoid any unwanted memories, thoughts or feelings
- changes to mood and thinking. For example these can include major changes to beliefs about oneself, others or the world, as well as major changes to your emotional state (that gets in the way of living the life you want to live).

It's important to get help if these changes:

- have been happening for one month or longer
- keep getting worse
- interfere with school, work, your relationships or activities that you enjoy
- cause distress or upset you
- make you think of harming yourself or someone else.

PTSD can increase the risk of developing other mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or harmful levels of alcohol and other drug use.

Looking after yourself

Life can feel chaotic, unsettling and confusing after a traumatic event, so it's important to do things to look after yourself. You can:



get support from people you trust, including your friends, family or teachers by letting them know how you're feeling



get back into your usual routines, like returning to work, school, sports and other hobbies you have



make time for exercise and rest, and for activities that you enjoy



learn some new coping skills



decide what media coverage you can cope with – avoid watching or reading about anything you find upsetting.

When you feel ready, it can be helpful to talk to people about your experiences and try to understand the event.



Where can I get help?

After experiencing any life trauma, going to talk to someone can be useful in preventing PTSD. There are many general practitioners (GPs) and other health professionals that can help with your recovery. Many of them have worked with young people who have experienced trauma and will be able to help you deal with the stress.

A good place to start might be your local community health centre or headspace centre, or you might want to talk with a trusted friend, teacher or family member about someone they can recommend.

Remember that you won't need to talk about the details of the experience unless you feel completely comfortable and safe.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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