

# Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

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*What exactly is PTSD? What causes it? Who suffers from it? And can it be treated effectively? This week, let's take a close look at what causes PTSD, why and how it affects sufferers, and how they can find the supports and treatment they need to move beyond their trauma.*

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There are a lot of myths and misunderstandings around Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and those who suffer from its potentially devastating effects. Many of these misunderstandings are due to sensationalized characterizations of the condition in movies and television, with people suffering from PTSD depicted as dangerous, unstable, and incurable. As with many mental health conditions, the myths around PTSD can be extremely harmful and hurtful for those who suffer from this condition.

## ***Experiencing or witnessing life-threatening trauma***

What typically comes to mind when most of us think about PTSD, is a member of the military, back home after a tour of active duty, haunted by their wartime experiences. But virtually anyone could suffer from PTSD. Any one of us, at any time, could suffer or witness first-hand a life-threatening trauma. And it is in the aftermath of experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening trauma that PTSD can take root.

PTSD initiates with a traumatic experience or exposure to actual or threatened sudden death, serious injury, or violent assault, sexual violence, or the serious injury or sudden, unexpected death of a loved one. This involves witnessing or experiencing a traumatic, life-threatening event. Traumatic, life-threatening situations include natural disasters, serious industrial, home, recreational, or transportation (plane, car, or other vehicles) accidents, physical or sexual assault, and combat or war zone exposure. It is also possible to experience PTSD upon learning that an accidental or intentional traumatic event has happened to a close

friend or family member. Further, individuals, such as first responders and police officers who are exposed over and over again to traumatic events in their work can suffer from PTSD.

## ***After the trauma***

It is perfectly normal and natural to feel frightened and traumatized by a life-threatening event. In the first few months following the experience of a traumatic event, people move through a whole range of emotions and symptoms, vividly replaying and reliving the event, possibly feeling a great deal of unease and fear. But eventually, most people recover from these symptoms and move on from their trauma. For those who suffer from PTSD, these symptoms persist beyond a few months. For some, PTSD symptoms can show up later, even years after a traumatic event.

## ***Troubling, prolonged symptoms***

People who suffer from PTSD can experience any number of disturbing and distressing symptoms that prevent them from living a full and enjoyable life. They may be plagued with intrusive and upsetting memories and/or dreams of the traumatic event. They may experience flashbacks, and in some instances temporarily lose touch with the present and feel that they are in life-threatening danger. They may suffer momentary or prolonged distress when exposed to a trigger — that is to say a reminder — of their trauma. Triggers might include anything, from a sound, an odor, a sight, anything that reminds them of some element of their traumatic event. These triggers might also set off distressing psychological reactions.

### **Memories, thoughts, feelings, and actions**

People who suffer from PTSD might also avoid triggers and suppress memories, thoughts, and feelings of their trauma. They may suffer from associative amnesia, an inability to remember some parts of their traumatic event. They may harbor strong negative self-beliefs, and feel that they are weak or too damaged to recover. They may be hypervigilant, easily startled, and distrust others. They may feel unsafe in the world. They may have difficulty concentrating, sleeping. They may blame themselves for their trauma. They may experience persistent and overpowering anger, fear, shame, or guilt, or may engage in negative interactions involving verbal or physical aggression. They may feel isolated and detached from other people, and unable to enjoy life. They may engage in risky behaviors.

These symptoms can emerge over time, and persist and increase if left untreated. The good news is that there are effective treatments available for those suffering from PTSD.

### **Effective treatments**

Effective treatments for PTSD include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PET), and Stress Inoculation Training (SIT). A particularly effective form of therapy for sufferers of PTSD is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). This interactive form of therapy is proven to greatly relieve, reduce or remove psychological stress. In some cases, medications can help alleviate or manage troubling symptoms.

### **No time like the present**

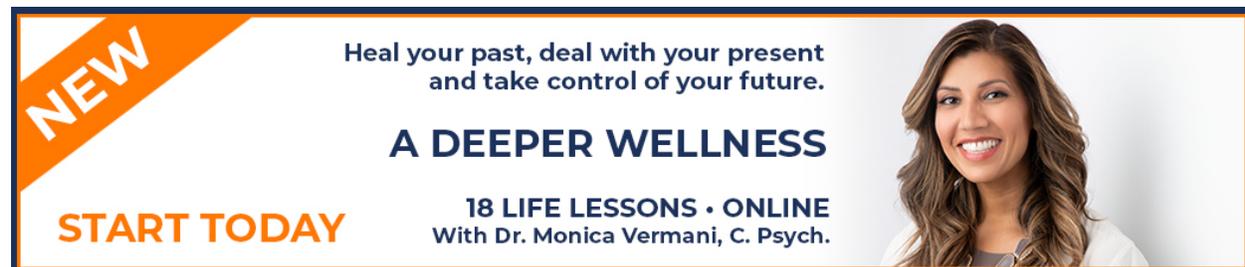
As with any mental health condition, replacing stigma, myths, and ignorance with knowledge, compassion and the ability to recognize symptoms are the first steps to finding help. There are highly effective treatments available, and if you, or someone close to you, suffers from PTSD, there is no time like the present to begin to heal and create a healthier, happier future. Talk to a trusted friend or family member, seek the help of a primary care physician, or talk to your EAP insurance provider, or connect with one of the resources in the list at the end of this article.

### **Seeking Treatment for PTSD**

*Understanding the causes and recognizing the symptoms of PTSD are the first steps to healing. If you believe that you or someone you know suffers from PTSD, there are resources, help and effective treatments available. You can:*

- **Confide** in a trusted friend or family member who can support and help you connect with the resources you need
- **Talk** to your doctor or a primary care physician
- **Seek** help from your insurance provider if you are an employee with an EAP

- Connect with one of the many PTSD resources across Canada. Start here: [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) 416-646-5557



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### *About the author*

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021. <https://www.drmonicavermani.com/>*

*Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, [A Deeper Wellness](https://www.adeeperwellness.com/), delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>*



[Canadian Psychological Association](#)  
1-888-472-0657

Native Youth Crisis Hotline  
1-877-209-1266

[Mental Health Commission](#)  
613-683-3755

Resources by province

**British Columbia**  
[Adlerian Psychology Association of B.C.](#)  
604-742-1818

[eMental Health](#)  
[Government of Canada](#)  
[Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](#)  
204-784-4073

[B.C. Association of Clinical Counsellors](#)  
1-800-909-6303

National Crisis Hotlines  
[Canada Drug Rehab Addiction Services Directory](#)  
1-866-462-6362

[British Columbia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Crisis Centre](#)  
1-800-784-2433

[Centre for Suicide Prevention](#)  
1-833-456-4566

[Canadian Mental Health Association - British Columbia Division](#)  
1-800-555-8222

[Crisis Services Canada](#)  
1-833-456-4566, or text 45645

**Alberta**  
[Psychologists' Association of Alberta](#)  
1-888-424-0297

[First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line](#)  
1-855-242-3310

[Alberta Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Distress Centre](#)  
403-266-4357

[Kids Help Phone](#)  
1-800-668-6868

[National Eating Disorder Information Centre](#)  
1-866-633-4220

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Alberta Division](#)  
780-482-6576

**Saskatchewan**

[Psychology Association of Saskatchewan](#)  
[Saskatchewan College of Psychologists](#)  
306-352-1699

[Saskatchewan Association for Marriage and Family Therapy](#)  
[Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service](#)  
306-933-6200

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Saskatchewan Division](#)  
1-800-461-5483

**Manitoba**

[Manitoba Association for Marriage and Family Therapists](#)  
[Manitoba Psychological Society](#)  
204-488-7398

Manitoba Crisis Line  
1-888-322-3019

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Manitoba Division](#)  
204-982-6100

**Ontario**

[Ontario Society of Psychotherapists](#)  
416-923-4050  
[Ontario Association for Marriage and Family Therapists](#)  
[Ontario Psychological Association](#)  
[Ontario Mental Health Helpline](#)  
1-866-531-2600

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Ontario Division](#)  
416-977-5580

**Quebec**

[Association des psychothérapeutes psychanalytiques du Québec](#)  
[Ordre des psychologues du Québec](#)  
[Action on Mental Illness](#)  
1-877-303-0264

[Centre de Prevention du Suicide de Quebec](#)  
1-866-277-3553

**Newfoundland and Labrador**

[Association of Psychology in Newfoundland Labrador](#)  
[Newfoundland and Labrador Counsellors' and Psychologists' Association](#)  
[Mobile Crisis Response Team](#)  
1-888-737-4668

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Newfoundland and Labrador Division](#)  
1-877-753-8550

**New Brunswick**

[College of Psychologists New Brunswick](#)  
[Chimo Helpline](#)  
1-800-667-5005

[Canadian Mental Health Association - New Brunswick Division](#)  
506-455-5231

**Prince Edward Island**

[Prince Edward Island Counselling Association](#)  
[Family Service PEI](#)  
1-866-892-2441

[The Island Helpline](#)  
1-800-218-2885

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Prince Edward Island Division](#)  
902-566-3034

**Nova Scotia**

[Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia](#)

902-422-9183

[Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselling Association](#)

1-866-588-5954

[Nova Scotia College of Counselling Therapists](#)

902-225-7531

[Capital Health - Mental Health Mobile Crisis](#)

1-888-429-8167

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Nova Scotia Division](#)

1-888-429-8167

Resources by territory

**Yukon**

[Yukon Distress and Support Line](#)

1-844-533-3030

[Yukon Health and Social Services](#)

1-800-667-8346

**Northwest Territories**

[Northwest Territories Help Line](#)

1-867-767-9061

**Nunavut**

[Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line](#)

1-800-265-3333