What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a disorder that some people get when it becomes hard to cope after seeing or living through a dangerous event such as natural disaster or interpersonal trauma (e.g., violent physical or sexual assault). When in danger, it’s natural to feel afraid. This fear triggers changes in the body to prepare to defend against the danger or to avoid it. This “fight-or-flight” response is a healthy reaction meant to protect a person from harm. But in PTSD, this reaction is changed or damaged. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or scared even when they’re no longer in danger.

What does it mean to have PTSD?

PTSD can cause many symptoms. These symptoms can be grouped into four categories:

1. **Hyperarousal symptoms:**

* Being easily startled
* Feeling tense or “on edge”
* Having difficulty sleeping
* angry outbursts
* Acting or feeling reckless
* Problems with concentration

1. **Avoidance symptoms:** Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the experience. For example, after an accident a person may avoid driving or riding in a car.

Reference: DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013

1. **Negative changes in mood:**

* Feeling emotionally numb
* Feeling strong guilt, depression, or worry
* Losing interest in activities that you enjoyed
* Having trouble remembering the dangerous event
* Feeling unable to experience happy, loving emotions

1. **Re-experiencing symptoms:** Re-experiencing symptoms may cause problems in a person’s everyday routine. They can start from the person’s own thoughts and feelings. Words, objects, or situations that are reminders of the event can also trigger re-experiencing.

* Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating
* Bad dreams
* Scary thoughts

Are there other problems from PTSD?

Persons with PTSD often have other problems as well; depression and substance abuse are common in people with PTSD. Sometimes there may be physical symptoms like high blood pressure and asthma, too.

How can I help myself if I have PTSD?

In Job Corps, our goal of treatment for PTSD is to help you understand   
  
and manage your condition so you can move toward finding employment. It may include cognitive behavioral therapy, medication, and participation in groups and activities.

* Talk to your counselor and health and wellness staff
* Engage in mild exercise to help reduce stress
* Break up large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can as you can
* Tell others including staff about things that may trigger symptoms
* Expect your symptoms to improve gradually, not immediately; some setbacks are normal
* Identify and seek out comforting situations, places, and people

I know someone who has PTSD. What can I do?

* If they are thinking about hurting them self or someone else get help immediately
* Do not leave the person alone
* Let the nearest Job Corps staff member know NOW!
* If not able to find a Job Corps staff member quickly, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room
* Access the Job Corps Safety Hotline (844-JC1-SAFE) via text, email, phone, mobile app or web site
* Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
  (800) 273-TALK (8255)  
  TTY: (800) 799-4TTY (4889)