



## June is PTSD Awareness Month

Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Awareness, Impact, and Healing

Although often associated with combat veterans, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can impact any person of any age after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. These experiences may include military combat, sexual or physical violence, natural disasters, serious accidents, or other life-threatening or deeply distressing situations. PTSD is not a sign of weakness. It is a human response to overwhelming events, and it deserves compassion, understanding, and appropriate care.

### Recognizing Normal Stress vs. PTSD

After a traumatic event, it is completely normal to experience stress reactions. Many individuals find themselves replaying the event in their minds, feeling anxious or “on edge,” or having difficulty sleeping. These reactions are part of the body’s natural attempt to process what happened and to stay safe.

For many people, these symptoms gradually decrease over time. However, when symptoms persist beyond a few months, intensify, or begin to interfere with daily life, it may indicate the development of PTSD. Early recognition is important, as timely support and treatment can significantly improve outcomes.

### Common Symptoms of PTSD

Individuals with PTSD may experience a range of symptoms that affect their emotional, physical, and psychological well-being. These may include:

- Intrusive memories or flashbacks
- Recurring, unwanted memories of the traumatic event that may feel vivid and distressing
- Nightmares
- Disturbing dreams related to the trauma that disrupt sleep
- Avoidance behaviors
- Staying away from people, places, or situations that trigger memories of the trauma
- Heightened reactions: \*\* Feeling easily startled, constantly on guard, or having difficulty relaxing
- Mood and thought changes
- Experiencing anxiety, sadness, guilt, or emotional numbness
- Functional impacts
- Difficulty maintaining relationships, performing at work, or engaging in everyday activities

These symptoms can vary in severity and may come and go over time. Without support, they can interfere significantly with a person’s quality of life.

### PTSD in Children and Adolescents

PTSD does not present the same way in everyone, especially in children. Young people may lack the language or emotional awareness to describe what they are experiencing. Instead, symptoms may appear as:

- Increased irritability or temper tantrums
- Regression in behaviors (such as bedwetting or clinginess)
- Reenacting aspects of the trauma during play
- Difficulty concentrating in school
- Withdrawal from friends or family

Recognizing these signs is critical, as early intervention can help children process trauma in healthy and developmentally appropriate ways. **(continued on page 2)**



## Who Is Affected?

PTSD is more common than many people realize. Approximately 6% of the population, around 12 million individuals, experience PTSD in any given year. While veterans are often highlighted due to the nature of their experiences, PTSD affects individuals across all communities and backgrounds.

### Among veterans:

- Approximately 11–20% of those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom experience PTSD in a given year
- About 12% of Gulf War veterans are affected annually
- An estimated **\*\*30% of Vietnam veterans\*\*** have experienced PTSD at some point in their lifetime

These statistics underscore both the significant impact of trauma and the importance of accessible mental health care for those who have served, as well as for the broader population.

### The Importance of Diagnosis and Treatment

PTSD is a serious condition that should be diagnosed and treated by a qualified mental health professional. A comprehensive evaluation helps distinguish PTSD from other conditions, such as anxiety disorders or depression, which may have overlapping symptoms.

Effective treatments are available and can make a meaningful difference. These may include:

- Trauma-focused psychotherapy (such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or EMDR)
- Medication management when appropriate
- Support groups and peer connections
- Holistic approaches including mindfulness, stress reduction, and wellness practices

Treatment is not one-size-fits-all. A personalized plan, developed collaboratively with a licensed professional, offers the best chance for recovery.

### Moving Toward Healing

Living with PTSD can feel isolating, but it is important to remember that healing is possible. With the right support, individuals can regain a sense of safety, rebuild relationships, and reconnect with their goals and values.

If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of PTSD, reaching out is a powerful first step. Mental health professionals are trained to provide compassionate, evidence-based care that promotes recovery and resilience.

PTSD is a complex and deeply human response to trauma. By increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and encouraging access to care, we can help individuals and families move toward healing. No one has to face trauma alone and support is available.