

PTSD in Children & Adolescents

What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD?

All children and adolescents experience stressful events which can affect them both emotionally and physically. Their reactions to stress are usually brief, and they recover without further problems. Extremely stressful events like physical abuse, sexual abuse, violence in the home, natural disasters, and being diagnosed with life threatening illness can cause a child to experience ongoing difficulties known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While these are more common traumatic events, children can experience trauma in many different settings and interactions.

Following the trauma, children and adolescents may initially show agitated or confused behavior. They may also show intense fear, helplessness, anger, sadness, horror, or denial. A child's risk of developing PTSD is related to the seriousness of the trauma and whether the trauma is repeated.

The experience of PTSD includes physical and emotional responses. A child or adolescent may re-experience the event or express their difficulties in their general behavior.

Children and adolescents re-experiencing the event may be:

- Having frequent memories of the event, or having nightmares
- Acting or feeling like the event is happening again
- Having a physical or emotional reaction when the event is discussed

Children and adolescents may express their difficulties by:

- Showing an increased alertness to their surroundings
- Worrying about dying at an early age
- Repeating behavior that reminds them of the trauma
- Losing interest in activities
- Having more extreme and sudden emotional reactions
- Having trouble sleeping and problems with concentration

How can PTSD be treated?

Early intervention is essential and emphasis needs to be placed on establishing a feeling of safety. Treatment can be effective when there is support from caregivers, schools, and the community. Specific therapies to address PTSD include exposure therapy, cognitive restructuring, and stress inoculation training. More information about

Source: <http://www.mhwestchester.org/content/ptsd-children-adolescents>

these therapies can be found on the websites listed below. Medications have been found to be useful in managing PTSD symptoms. Getting counseling and talking about what has happened after a traumatic event can sometimes prevent PTSD from developing.

In addition, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is an innovative clinical treatment used to alleviate PTSD symptoms.

Additional Information About PTSD

[National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)

NIMH is an agency of the United States government that does research on mental illnesses. This site has simple, easy-to-read information on all disorders, their causes, symptoms and effective treatments.

[Mental Health America \(MHA\)](#)

MHA is a national organization dedicated to promoting mental health through education and advocacy. This site has clear, detailed information on PTSD, including research on its causes.

[Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General](#)

This is the first report on mental health from the United States Surgeon General. It was issued in December 1999. This site provides information from research studies on how stressful events affect people and effective treatments for such persons.

[National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)

Founded in 1989, the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a clearinghouse for all information and activities related to PTSD and is widely sought out for its research, education and consultation expertise. The site contains facts about PTSD as well as information about research and treatment.

[Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing \(EMDR\)](#)

This site provides information on Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) including an overview and general description. It also includes a section on training, publications, controlled studies and clinician referrals. It is maintained by the EMDR Institute.