

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder caused by a very stressful, frightening, life threatening or distressing event. PTSD can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a serious accident, severe injury, serious health problem or a violent personal assault or attack. The ways in which symptoms of PTSD are experienced varies widely from person to person. The symptoms normally begin within the first few months after the traumatic experience has happened, however some symptoms may appear later.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

Symptoms of PTSD can cause significant distress and upset, as well as causing problems with a person's functioning, wellbeing and mood. These symptoms are often severe enough to have a significant impact on the person's day-to-day life.

Trauma symptoms can be categorised into 4 areas of difficulty:

1. Re-experiencing / memories
2. Hyperarousal – changes in the body
3. Avoidant behaviour
4. Changes in mood and thinking

People who have symptoms of PTSD can experience **intense, disturbing thoughts** and **feelings** related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended.

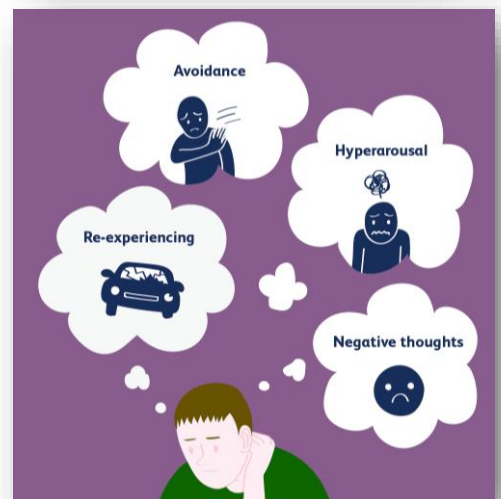
They may **relive** and **re-experience** their frightening event again through **flashbacks** and **nightmares**; they may **feel sadness, fear** or **anger**; and they may **feel detached** from people around them.

They may **lose interest in things** they once enjoyed and have trouble feeling affectionate.

People with PTSD may notice that they have started to **avoid situations** or people that remind them of the traumatic event, and they may have **strong negative reactions** to something as ordinary as a loud noise or an accidental touch.

They may also have problems with **sleeping** and find it **difficult to concentrate**.

PTSD can also occur alongside **other difficulties** such as **depression, substance misuse, memory problems** and **other physical and mental health problems**.



Our Trauma Response

We all have an internal alarm system called the 'fight and flight' response. The aim of this internal alarm system is to keep us alive. It is automatic and immediate. When we sense danger, threat or risk our fight and flight mechanism is triggered. This then rapidly and automatically releases adrenalin and energy into our body to help fight the danger or flight, run away from the danger as fast as we can. We cannot survive without our fight and flight system. In your own traumatic experience, your fight and flight mechanism will have been triggered and will have guided how you responded and behaved in that experience.

Our fight and flight mechanism is very sensitive and can be triggered by 'false alarms' such as thoughts or memories, when there is no real threat present. Your life is not in danger thinking about your traumatic experience however because you feel anxiety, worry, dread and fear, your body reacted in the same way it would do if you were in a life threatening situation once again, which is very unhelpful.



Fight

Action: **Attack**
Emotion: **Anger**
Outcomes: **Insult, Blame, Mistreat**



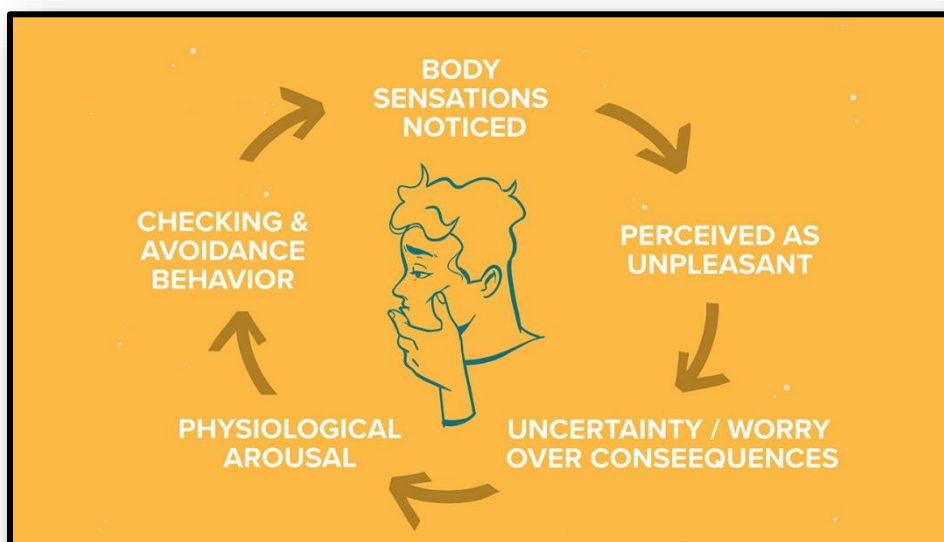
Flight

Action: **Hide**
Emotion: **Denial**
Outcomes: **Avoid, Omit, Sabotage**



Freeze

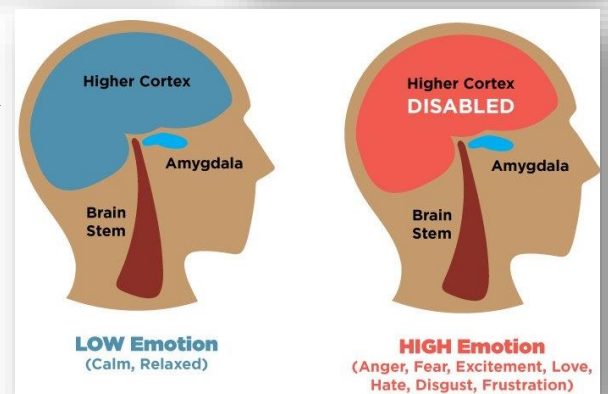
Action: **Comply**
Emotion: **Shut Down**
Outcomes: **Justify and Rationalize**



Our emotions are also heightened.



An aim of therapy is to learn to control this alarm system when it goes off unnecessarily and when it is unhelpful.



Getting Started on Controlling Symptoms Of PTSD

1. Controlled Breathing

Controlled breathing is a relaxation technique which reduces the body symptoms of anxiety, panic and stress. When you are anxious, panicked or stressed, your fight and flight mechanism tells you to breathe in more oxygen. We therefore lose the balance between oxygen (breath in) and carbon dioxide (breath out).

By balancing your breathing, you can control your emotions and calm your mind. From the quiet mind arises the wisdom and insight that help you make good choices.


This imbalance is called **hyperventilation**

which can cause uncomfortable symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, and feeling dizzy, light-headed and weak. Learning to control our breathing means we learn to control and reduce the symptoms of fight and flight.

Controlled breathing is slower and deeper than normal breathing and happens in our stomach rather than our chest. Imagine a balloon in your stomach. Breathe in slowly counting to four (you should notice your stomach move out slightly as if the balloon was inflating), before breathing out to the count of four (you should notice your stomach move in slightly as if the balloon was deflating). Repeat this cycle.

2. 'Safe Place' Relaxation

Visualisation or imagery is another useful relaxation tool. Bring into your mind a place where you feel peaceful and safe. A place where you feel calm and relaxed. Maybe this is a previous holiday you have been on or it may simply be somewhere like your garden, allotment or local park?



Mental health: having enough safe places in your mind for your thoughts to settle.

The aim of this exercise is to allow you to escape from the trauma memory as well as escape from daily stresses; to allow your mind to imagine a place where you feel completely safe, calm and relaxed. Use your senses to imagine yourself in your safe place; what can you smell, taste, see, touch and hear in your peaceful place. This can be a useful relaxation exercise to practice calming yourself down after a frightening flashback or memory.

- **Step One:** Visualize a Safe Place Location
- **Step Two:** Visualise a Protector of Your Safe Place
- **Step Three:** Remove Any Negative Aspects from Your Safe Place

3. Grounding techniques

We can manage our flashback, nightmares and memories by using strategies called grounding techniques. Grounding techniques move our focus of attention away from our past traumas to bring our attention back into the present moment where we are safe.

Mental grounding strategies:

Mental strategies are what we tell ourselves to bring our attention back to the present moment. If your flashback is taking your focus back to your past trauma, then use your own words of kindness, reassurance and comfort to bring your attention back to the here and now.

"The worst is over", "It happened in the past, but it is not happening now", "I am safe now"

"I survived the awfulness then, so I can survive and get through what I am remembering now"

Ask yourself questions in order to bring yourself into the present moment: where am I right now? What day is it? What year is it? These questions will help to redirect your attention away from your previously experienced or witnessed trauma and into the present moment. You could say these questions to yourself or even write them down. Keep this grounding card in places where you know you are likely to experience a flashback, for example next to your bed, on your fridge or next to your TV. Take a photo of this coping card on your phone and have it as a mobile phone screen saver or as a saved picture for when you experience a flashback outside your home.

Physical grounding strategies:

Physical strategies are practical things you can do to help bring your attention back to the present moment. Use your senses to help bring your attention and focus back to the present moment and out of your previously experienced trauma.

- **Open your eyes:** put a light on if it's a dark room
- **Look around:** notice the colours, the people, the shapes of things.
- **Listen:** notice the sounds around you: the traffic, voices, washing machine, music etc.
- **Notice your body:** how your clothes feel on your skin, movement of your hair, feel the chair or the floor supporting you – how that feels in your feet, your legs, your body.
- **Smell:** notice the smells around you.
- **Taste:** notice any tastes

Re-orient yourself in place and time by asking yourself some or all of these questions:

1. Where am I?
2. What is today?
3. What is the date?
4. What is the month?
5. What is the year?
6. How old am I?

The Five Senses



Sight



Hearing



Smell



Taste



Touch



Touch: Some people like to hold or touch a grounding object such as a small stone, pendant or piece of jewellery as a method of bringing their attention back to the present moment. When you touch this grounding object, this will remind you that you are in the here and now; to bring you back to the present moment if you get caught up in an unwanted trauma memory.



Smell: Try to find a smell that has a positive association for you; a smell that reminds you of happy times, or a smell that you enjoy. If your flashbacks contain a strong smell element, a smell that was present at the time of your trauma that reappears when you are having a flashback, then using a positive smell may be a helpful and useful grounding technique for you to try. For example, a small bottle of essential oil, perfume-soaked tissue, spices from the kitchen or small dried flowers.

GROUND

YOURSELF

Collect items that are meaningful, or that you know will be helpful to soothe you. It can be useful to keep this soothing bag or box in a handy place, so that when you feel overwhelming distress, you can go to your bag/box and find something that will help you to cope and feel better.

Treatment of PTSD

PTSD can be successfully treated through psychological therapies.

Within the Wellbeing Services, the '**Light Bulb Group**' is the first intervention offered to people who have experienced a trauma and who continue to experience symptoms after this frightening event.

The Light Bulb Group is a 5-week educational group based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy principles and techniques to help you overcome symptoms of trauma. You can watch this group as a video link on the Wellbeing Services website or you can sign up to the group that is delivered virtually by a qualified Wellbeing Services clinician.

Access our Resources Here: <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/>





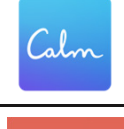
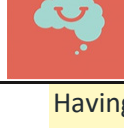
**IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE
TO HEAL PTSD**

BUT NOBODY CAN DO IT ALONE

Our recommended resources (click for direct access):

NHS Inform	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. Please visit: NHS Inform
Wellbeing	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. Please visit: Wellbeing Website Glasgow
Mental Health Foundation	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. Please visit: Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation
NHS Every Mind Matters	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. Please visit: Every Mind Matters
Psych Central	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. Please visit: PsychCentral for Mental Health
MIND	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. Please visit: MIND Information Hub
SAMH	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. Please visit: SAMH Guidance for Mental Health

Useful Apps:

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.