

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is characterised by clinically significant distress across major life areas, for instance in their occupation, interpersonal interactions, and general planning and activities of daily life.

PTSD can be experienced by anybody exposed to a traumatising event, for instance: accidents, threats of violence or natural disasters. A common occupation where PTSD can occur is for people who are in the military exposed to war torn areas of the world.



Main types of PTSD symptoms, individuals may:

1. Re-experience memories of the event, have dreams, nightmares or flashbacks. People may also have severe psychological distress as a result of these thoughts.
2. Avoid any memories thoughts, feelings, or reminders in their environment of the original event.
3. Display negative thoughts or mood states. This can include a decreased interest in activities, self-blame, or poor memory recall of the original event.
4. Show arousal based symptoms. This can include displaying overt aggressive behaviour, recklessness, or being on guard or hypervigilant. Some individuals may also experience significant sleep problems.

How you help as a HYPAR mentor:

As a HYPAR mentor, you may be working alongside males who have been diagnosed with PTSD or exhibit these symptoms. As part of your role with people who have PTSD there will be common themes in line with other work completed by HYPAR mentors. This includes: being a steadying influence on the individual, building rapport and being attuned to the needs of individuals in need of your support. Other important HYPAR practices will include having a clear awareness of PTSD, understanding the needs of the individual, as well as purposeful planning. The power of rapport within the therapeutic relationship is key to positive outcomes for people with PTSD.

Reflection point:

It may not be possible for you to always pre-empt the right types of support for the individual at all times. However, being present focussed with the individual, being supportive and listening will be important. It is good to let the person know that they can take interactions at their own pace, and they will not be pressured to participate if they are feeling uncomfortable. Let them know that you are there as a supportive influence and that it is ok if events do not occur according to plan.

Individuals with PTSD may feel self-conscious about their abilities to manage.

They may not feel as though they are a strong person and may wish to avoid feeling reliant on other people or helpless. If you encounter behaviour where you feel the person appears self-conscious, remember to gently reinforce that you are there as a supportive influence, and are experienced in working with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. This will help to reinforce the HYPAR environment as a safe, nonjudgmental place of support.



When in doubt, apply the following problem solving framework to assist people with PTSD

1. *What behaviour am I seeing?*
2. *What is the young person really saying (e.g. "something has triggered my fears")?*
3. *What purpose does their current behaviour serve (e.g. pushing people away, maintaining safety)?*
4. *How can I be patient, calm and empathic, to support the person along in their journey?*
5. *How can I remain attuned and helpful?*

Helping people with PTSD

- Take some time to understand PTSD, know the person's interests and the types of activities they would enjoy whilst working with you, and their preferred style of communication or interaction.
- Understand the impact of trauma responses on the individual- support the person starting with where they are most comfortable and avoid placing undue pressure. Sit and be with the person. Listen when required. Think about how the person may feel about their own identity.
- Remember you do not need to be a therapist or need to give any special advice as there is lots of power in building rapport, listening and being with and alongside the individual in their journey.
- If you feel you would like to converse with the person (if they share some of their story with you) try reflecting back general feelings or content, for example: "that would have been an extremely difficult situation". "I cannot imagine what that may have been like", "I can understand it must have felt difficult to adjust back to life at home/ work after the event".
- Include activities to establish trust and safety, engage in physical activity, make connections with others, and identifying self-regulating activities to calm the nervous system. Other activities can include physical self-care, managing unwanted thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares. Some individuals may need to address occurrences such as survivor's guilt, or may also need to seek professional help such as counselling.
- Maintain awareness of the strong physiological responses for the individual which may not subside, even with the passing of time. Understand that the process to recovery is personal, it may be difficult and take some time. It is important to sit and be with the person, and to walk alongside them in their journey, without needing to find quick solutions or ways to make things better right away.
- Apply the same principles as for people with challenging behaviour, disability, trauma and attachment needs. This can include positive and practice support, acceptance, patience, understanding and empathy, steadying influence, negotiate room for progress or goal setting and focus and revisit on how the working relationship unfolds.