



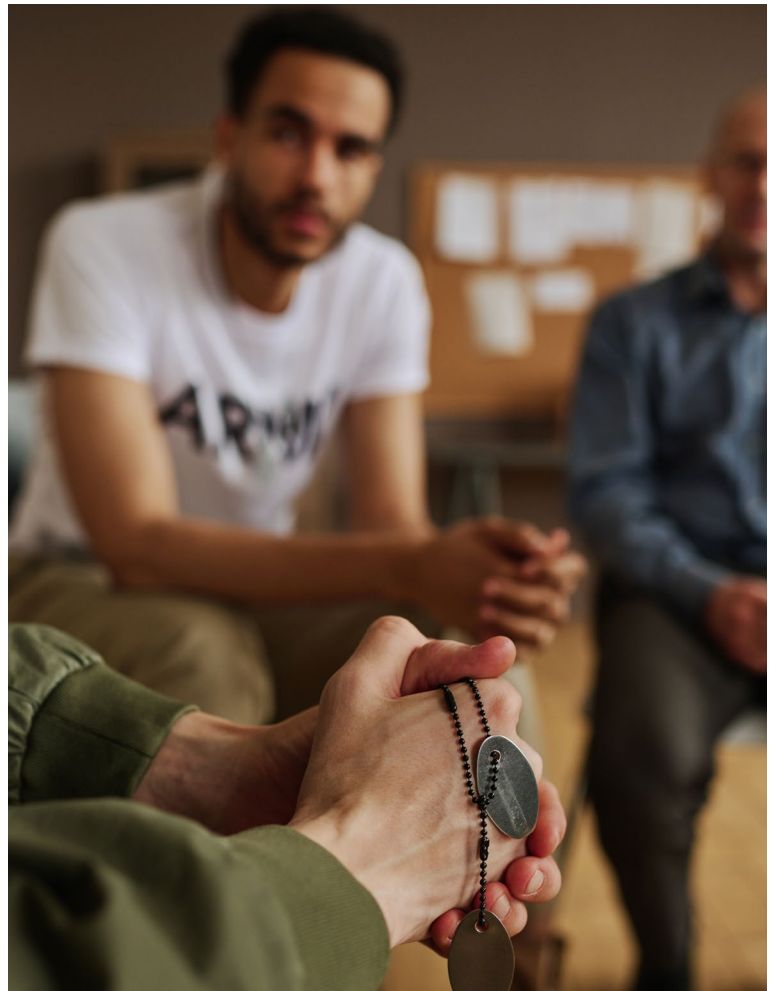
FOR KIDS: WHAT IS PTSD?

Maybe your parent or another loved one told you they have PTSD, or you wonder if they have it. What is PTSD? PTSD is a short name for post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD includes upsetting thoughts, feelings, and behaviors some people have for a long time after bad or scary things happen to them or when they see something bad or scary.

Sometimes service members, firefighters, and police officers experience scary things while doing their jobs to help keep us safe. As a result, they may develop PTSD. But PTSD can happen to anybody. It can happen to kids, teenagers, moms, dads, and other grown-ups who have very scary experiences. PTSD can result from experiencing big storms like tornadoes, bad car accidents, getting hurt by others, getting touched in bad ways, or other scary situations. It's important to know even after a scary situation, most people do not develop PTSD.

What does PTSD look and sound like?

Everybody sometimes feels mad, sad, scared, or worried. We can all get angry, argue, and yell at times. But when somebody is angry for a long period of time, overreacts to “triggers” or reminders of bad things that happened, or disconnects from other people because of how badly they feel, it is more likely they are suffering from PTSD. Doctors are trained to identify and treat PTSD. And the good news is PTSD is treatable and people can feel better after receiving treatment. Here are some clues:



Does the person:

- look mad, scared, sad or worried a lot of the time?
- get annoyed or upset over simple things?

OR

- stare into space or lay down a lot of the time?
- not want to do things or go places they used to?



Has someone told you they have PTSD?

Draw a picture of you and your family.

A large, empty rectangular area with rounded corners, outlined in purple, intended for drawing a picture of the user and their family.



PTSD and Triggers

PTSD is not your fault. People don't want to have PTSD. But because their mind is hurting, loud sounds can bring bad memories to these people. Even normal sounds of playing or talking might upset the person with PTSD. Surprises can also bring back bad memories. Lots of different things (even simple things) can bring back bad memories and can make people feel their PTSD even more. We call those things triggers.

Can you think of any other triggers?

What do you think are three triggers of the person with PTSD?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Book about PTSD:

My Daddy Has PTSD

A Book for Young Children of Veterans

Daddy's Home

A Picture Book for Military Families (ages 3-6)

Hey Warrior

A Book for Kids About Anxiety

Why Are You So Scared?

A Child's Book About Parents with PTSD

The Huge Bag of Worries

A Book for Kids About Having Worries

Why Is Mom So Mad?

A Book About PTSD and Military Families

Why Is Dad So Mad?

A Book About PTSD and Military Families

Videos for kids about PTSD:

- [What is PTSD?](#) (by UK Trauma Council)
- These whiteboard videos by the National Center for PTSD are also helpful.
<https://ptsd.va.gov/appvid/video/index.asp>
- The National Center for PTSD has an app called the PTSD Family Coach for PTSD.
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/familycoach_app.asp

Helpful Tips for Living with PTSD

Things might be a little different with PTSD in your home, but here are some ideas that could help:



Avoid triggers around the person with PTSD if you can. For example, if the person gets upset when woken from sleep, call that person's name from the doorway. As you do so, remember it's not your responsibility to "fix" their PTSD. But anything small can help!



Take deep breaths. Practice taking deep breaths on your own each day for 5-10 minutes.



Write or draw your feelings whatever they may be. Think about any good moments that day: big or small. What are things you are thankful for?



Talk with your parent. Try talking with your guardian, grandparent, or other family about PTSD.

Talk with a trusted grown-up. This is an adult who listens when you have a problem or question, helps make you feel safe, and respects your body and personal space.

Talk with a friend. Find a friend who listens and cares about what you are going through. There are many children who live with PTSD in their home. With your parent's permission, visit this website to talk with other military kids: [Military Kids Connect](#).



Make a Family Plan. Ask your parent if there is a family plan for living with PTSD. How do you talk about feelings or work through anger? Your family can use the Family Color Zones Chart to communicate feelings, the Levels of Anger, Aggression, and Coping Skills worksheet, the Family Goals worksheet, or you can brainstorm family activities that are okay to do.

Make a Family Response Plan. Talk about how the family will stay safe when the person with PTSD is very upset. For example, should you go to your room when the person is at an anger level of 3 and 4? See the Levels of Anger, Aggression, & Coping Skills worksheet.



Help in the home. Find one extra thing to do in your home. Do an extra chore, bring in the mail, read a book to a sibling, or write a thank you note. PTSD or not, a small act can strengthen your family!

Serve somebody. Is there someone at school or in your neighborhood who needs a smile, compliment, or a kind note? Like you, many other children are going through something hard at home that other people don't know about.

It's okay if the person with PTSD isn't ready to talk about PTSD right now. Maybe they will one day. You are still loved, and there are lots of military kids who also live with PTSD in their homes. You are not alone!



Below are real life scenarios other families living with PTSD have experienced:

Dad snaps at you for not being right next to him.

All parents want to keep their kids safe, but if your mom or dad has PTSD, they might show a very angry face and use a loud voice. Your dad loves and cares about you. Try to take some deep breaths.

Before your mom deployed, waking up your mom and having morning snuggles on the weekends was something you loved to do. Now, she will jump or jerk awake or yell at you for doing so.

Your mom still loves you. With PTSD, your mom might get mad, but this isn't your fault. PTSD can make people jumpy and super sensitive. You can ask your mom if there is a better time to snuggle each day. Sometimes parents need to set new boundaries during difficult times or situations.

You are playing with your dad when suddenly, he shouts at you to be quiet because you are being too loud.

Your dad loves you and wants to spend time with you, but the PTSD started to hurt his mind. Take some deep breaths. Try a different activity on your own. Ask your parent for a better time to play.

For the past few days, your dad hasn't been home much and when he is home, he eats, sleeps, and constantly looks at his phone and hardly talks to you.

A lot of people with PTSD will "zone out." Everyday life can suddenly be overwhelming. Your parent's emotions can be like a volcano and taking a time out to cool down for a little bit can help him. Talk to a trusted grown-up about how you feel.

References

- Althobaiti, S., Kazantzis, N., Ofori-Asenso, R., Romero, L., Fisher, J., Mills, K. E., & Liew, D. (2020). Efficacy of interpersonal psychotherapy for post-traumatic stress disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 264, 286-294. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.12.021>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- Brickell, T. A., French, L. M., Lippa, S. M., & Lange, R. T. (2018). The impact of deployment and traumatic brain injury on the health and behavior of children of US military service members and veterans. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 23(3), 425-441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104517740405>
- Brickell, T. A., French, L. M., Sullivan, J. K., Varbedian, N. V., Wright, M. M., & Lange, R. T. (2021). Unhealthy family functioning is associated with health-related quality of life among military spouse caregivers. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001055>



References

- Brownlow, J. A., Zitnik, G. A., McLean, C. P., & Gehrman, P. R. (2018). The influence of deployment stress and life stress on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis among military personnel. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 103, 26-32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2018.05.005>
- Christie, H., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Alves-Costa, F., Tomlinson, M., & Halligan, S. L. (2019). The impact of parental posttraumatic stress disorder on parenting: a systematic review. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 10(1),1550345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2018.1550345>
- Cozza, S. J. (2018). Family based interventions for PTSD. *Trauma-and stressor-related disorders*, 350.Horn, S. R., & Feder, A. (2018). Understanding resilience and preventing and treating PTSD. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 26(3), 158-174. <https://10.1093/med/9780190457136.001.0001>
- Gribble, R., Mahar, A. L., Keeling, M., Sullivan, K., McKeown, S., Burchill, S., ... & Castro, C. A. (2020). Are we family? A scoping review of how military families are defined in mental health and substance use research. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*, 6(2), 85-119. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-2019-0054>
- Horn, S. R., & Feder, A. (2018). Understanding resilience and preventing and treating PTSD. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 26(3), 158-174. <https://doi.org/10.1097/HRP.0000000000000194>
- Katz, L. F., Gurtovenko, K., Maliken, A., Stettler, N., Kawamura, J., & Fladeboe, K. (2020). An emotion coaching parenting intervention for families exposed to intimate partner violence. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(3), 638-651. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000800>
- Kennedy, J. E., Jaffee, M. S., Leskin, G. A., Stokes, J. W., Leal, F. O., & Fitzpatrick, P. J. (2007). Posttraumatic stress disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder-like symptoms and mild traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 44(7), 895-920. <https://doi.org/10.1682/jrrd.2006.12.0166>
- Knobloch, L. K., Owens, J. L., & Gobin, R. L. (2021). Soul wounds among combat trauma survivors: Experience, effects, and advice. *Traumatology*, 28(1), 11-23. <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000307>
- Kritikos, T. K., Comer, J. S., He, M., Curren, L. C., & Tompson, M. C. (2019). Combat experience and posttraumatic stress symptoms among military-serving parents: A meta-analytic examination of associated offspring and family outcomes. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 47(1), 131-148. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-018-0427-5>
- Marini, C. M., Collins, C. L., & MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M. (2018). Examining multiple rhythms of military and veteran family life. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(3), 516-534. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12275>
- Masten, A. S., & Barnes, A. J. (2018). Resilience in children: Developmental perspectives. *Children*, 5(7), 98. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children5070098>
- McGaw, V. E., Reupert, A. E., & Maybery, D. (2020). Partners of veterans with PTSD: Parenting and family experiences. *Families in Society*, 101(4), 456-468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1044389420905753>
- Miao, X. R., Chen, Q. B., Wei, K., Tao, K. M., & Lu, Z. J. (2018). Posttraumatic stress disorder: from diagnosis to prevention. *Military Medical Research*, 5(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40779-018-0179-0>
- Ord, A. S., Lad, S. S., Shura, R. D., Rowland, J. A., Taber, K. H., & Martindale, S. L. (2021). Pain interference and quality of life in combat veterans: Examining the roles of posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and sleep quality. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 66(1), 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rep0000333>
- Pencea, I., Munoz, A. P., Maples-Keller, J. L., Fiorillo, D., Schultebrucks, K., Galatzer-Levy, I., Rothbaum, B. O., Ressler, K. J., Stevens, J. S., Michopoulos, V., & Powers, A. (2020). Emotion dysregulation is associated with increased prospective risk for chronic PTSD development. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 121, 222-228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2019.12.008>
- Pennebaker, J. W., & Beall, S. K. (1986). Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 95(3), 274-281. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0021-843x.95.3.274>
- Pexton, S., Farrants, J., & Yule, W. (2018). The impact of fathers' military deployment on child adjustment. The support needs of primary school children and their families separated during active military service: A pilot study. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 23(1), 110-124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104517724494>
- Renshaw, K. D., Allen, E. S., Fredman, S. J., Giff, S. T., & Kern, C. (2020). Partners' motivations for accommodating posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in service members: The reasons for accommodation of PTSD scale. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 71, 102199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102199>
- Understanding PTSD: a guide for family and friends. (2019). U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD. <https://servingtontogetherproject.org/understanding-ptsd-a-guide-for-family-and-friends/>