



## **Caregiver Partners: Understanding and Healing the Wounds of PTSD Handout**

**Trauma vs. PTSD statistics.** Veterans are not the only people that suffer from PTSD. PTSD can occur if you have experienced a trauma. 50 to 90 percent of people have had a trauma in their lives. Only a small percentage of people that have had a trauma will get PTSD. 7 to 30 percent of people who have had a trauma will end up getting PTSD. Are you a caregiver with a history of trauma? Are you a caregiver that suffers from PTSD?

**What defines a trauma?** A trauma is an experience that threatens your safety. A trauma is an unexpected event. It can be a one-time event or series of events. You can experience a trauma first hand or as a witness. You can have trauma from a physical attack or accident. If you experience physical or sexual abuse you have had a trauma. Trauma can occur with serious neglect as a child. It can also occur if you were a witness to your parents' violence. During the traumas you are flooded with intense fear, horror, or helplessness.

**What is complex trauma?** Complex trauma is when you have many traumatic events. It often begins with childhood trauma. It happens when adult trauma is added to a history of trauma as a child. Childhood trauma raises the risk of trauma in adulthood. You may have trauma as an adult from such things as; relationship violence, or military combat.

**What happens to an individual at the time of the trauma?** Human bodies respond to trauma with waves of stress hormones. Stress hormones create the energy needed to fight or flee. Stress hormones flood your body and cause you to be very alert. They stir up the energy you need to protect yourself. Your thoughts are focused only on survival. During a trauma your mind may not process clearly what is going on. You also may not have full recall of what happened. During a trauma, you don't reflect on your emotions. You also don't process or express how you feel about what is happening. All your energy is focused on coping with the event. To cope you may shut off feelings, become numb or withdraw.

**Why does PTSD make sense?** PTSD symptoms are not a sign that you are broken. Your physical alert system is telling you, "Hey something painful just happened, pay attention. This hurt needs to be healed." Just like when you get a sliver in your finger, your body responds. Your finger gets; red, throbs, or infected. This is your body's natural alert telling you, "Hey get this sliver out of my finger." The symptoms of PTSD are similar. The memory of the trauma intrudes on your present life. It is trying to get



you to pay attention, so you can heal the injury to your psyche. The symptoms of PTSD cause you to relive the trauma as if it is frozen in time. The symptoms are stuck in their original state until you can process them. For the injury to heal you must process the trauma.

**How do you heal from PTSD? Process the trauma.**

- Reach out to others - Seek help and support
- Learn about PTSD, identify triggers, and plan coping strategies
- Fight the urge to avoid, hide, or isolate
- Face your fears at your pace
- Write, remember, share, and listen to your story
- Identify and express the feelings bound up in your story
- Learn to calm and soothe yourself
- Practice mindfulness meditation
- Find physical release for stress – Exercise
- Ground yourself in nature - Get outdoors
- Invest in your recovery and living your Life

**Seek Help**

**VA PTSD Web site <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>**

**VA PTSD Helpline 1-802-296-6300**

**VA Caregiver Support Web site <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>**

**VA Caregiver Support Line # 1-855-260-3274**

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