

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Clinician Brief Diagnostic Card

If you or someone you know is in emotional distress or experiencing a suicidal crisis, please call the



Developed by National Center for Telehealth & Technology, a Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury center.

Released: May 2016

Who Should You Screen?

People who were directly exposed to, or learned about, a traumatic event and experience the following symptoms:

- Intrusive thoughts or related symptoms
- Avoiding reminders of the event
- Negative changes in thoughts and mood
- Irritability, angry behaviors
- Hypervigilance
- Sleep disturbance
- Exaggerated startle response
- Difficulty concentrating
- Self-destructive or reckless behavior

People with symptoms that cause problems with daily living and last more than a month, should get screened for PTSD.



Screening and Referral Recommendations



Screening Assessment

PTSD Checklist (PCL-5)

The PTSD Checklist PCL-5 is a self-report measure used to assess PTSD symptoms. This version incorporates the changes made in the new edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). The PCL-5 is available from the National Center for PTSD website (www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp). This 20 item measure takes 5-10 minutes to complete. Instructions for administering and scoring are available on the website. Interpretation and diagnosis of PTSD should be made by a trained clinician.

The PCL-Military measure, that supports the diagnostic criteria from the DSM-IV, remains available as an online anonymous self-report measure on the AfterDeployment website (AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/assessment/pts). Users receive feedback about their results along with recommendations and resources for next steps. This instrument should only be used as a preliminary guide to symptoms. Interpretation and diagnosis of PTSD should be made by a trained clinician.

Common Presenting Symptoms*

- Physical: chronic pain, migraines, vague somatic complaints
- Mental: intoxication, anxiety or depression
- Behavior: irritability, avoidance, anger, or non-compliance, self-risk behavior, threatening or aggressive behavior
- Dissociative symptoms
- Change in function

Symptoms Clusters

Intrusion Symptoms (presence of 1 or more):

- Intrusive distressing memories
- Recurrent distressing dreams
- Dissociative reactions
- Intense or prolonged distress at exposure to internal or external cues
- Physiological reactions to internal or external cues

Avoidance of (presence of 1 or more):

- Distressing memories, thoughts or feelings
- External reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations)

Negative Thoughts and Mood (presence of 2 or more):

- Inability to remember an important aspect of the trauma
- Negative beliefs or expectations about self, others or the world
- Distorted thoughts about cause or consequence of the trauma that lead to blame of self or others
- Negative mood state
- Diminished interest or participation in activities
- Feeling detached or estranged
- Inability to experience positive emotions

Arousal and Reactivity (presence of 2 or more):

- Irritable and angry outbursts
- Reckless or self-destructive behavior
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response
- Problems concentrating
- Sleep disturbance (falling or staying asleep)

Note: These symptoms need to persist for more than a month. They need to cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning. These symptoms cannot be better explained by the physiological effects of a substance or other medication.

Referral Recommendations*

If you believe an individual has PTSD, refer them to a provider with training in an evidence-based treatment for PTSD such as cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), stress inoculation training, and/or pharmacological treatments (SSRIs, SNRIs).

To locate behavioral health providers near your location, visit AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/locate-help.

* Referral recommendation information obtained from: www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/MH/ptsd/CPGSummaryFINALMgmtofPTSDfinal021413.pdf.