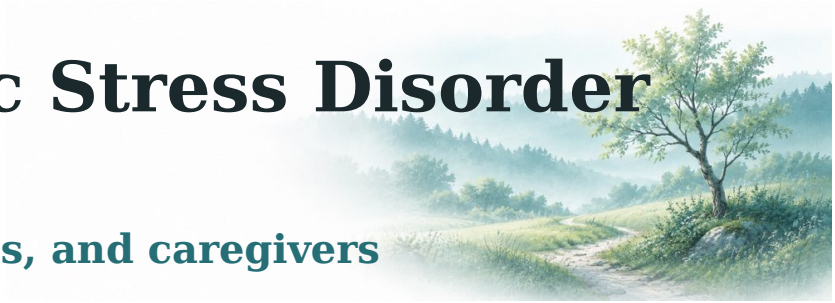
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



A guide for children, teens, and caregivers

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after a child experiences or witnesses trauma, such as violence or a serious accident. Distressing reactions persist and interfere with daily life. Not every child who experiences trauma develops PTSD. Symptoms can look different at different ages, and treatment can help children and families recover.

Common symptoms

- Upsetting memories, nightmares, or repeated trauma themes in play
- Distress or avoidance around reminders
- Feeling on alert; sleep or focus problems
- Irritability, guilt, or withdrawal
- Clinginess or new bed-wetting in younger children

Why does it happen?

Trauma can leave the body and mind reacting as though danger is still present. Previous experiences, biology, and available support can affect risk. PTSD is not a sign of weakness.

Treatment and outlook

Care begins with addressing ongoing danger and helping the child feel safe. Seek a clinician experienced in childhood trauma who can adapt treatment to the child's development, communication, and family circumstances.

Trauma-focused CBT is an evidence-supported option. It combines coping skills, gradual work with trauma reminders, and support from a safe caregiver when appropriate. Activities may include talking, drawing, writing, or play, but treatment follows a planned approach.

Caregivers and school staff can support recovery. Medication is not a substitute for trauma-focused therapy; a specialist may consider it for particular co-occurring problems. Review progress and safety together.

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Living with PTSD

Practical steps between appointments



Home and school

Offer safety: Be available and reassuring. Identify a trusted adult your child can turn to, and offer simple choices about daily activities.

Listen gently: Do not push your child to describe what happened. Let them express feelings when ready.

Keep routines: Keep meal, bedtime, and school routines steady. Limit distressing news or videos, and arrange support for your own stress.

When to seek help

Seek care when trauma symptoms persist or disrupt daily life.

If abuse or danger continues, seek protection for your child. Get immediate help for self-harm or threats of harm.

Get urgent help

For suicidal thoughts or a mental health crisis, call or text **988** in the US. Call **911** for immediate danger or a life-threatening emergency. Children and teens: tell a trusted adult right away.

For your next appointment

Which reminders, sleep problems, or school situations are most difficult? What helps your child feel safe? Ask how caregivers can support treatment without pressing for details of the trauma.

Learn more

psychiatry-atlas.com

Sources and References

1. **PTSD in Children and Adolescents**
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https://ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/specific/ptsd_child_teens.asp