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BY JOLENE

PARENTING

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8 Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children and Teens

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a much more common condition in children and teens than most adults want to believe. But, the facts and figures compiled at the government's [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/facts-and-figures) (NCTSN) show that a significant percentage of children have been exposed to trauma and later developed PTSD.

How can parents and other adults help children and teens living with undiagnosed, untreated PTSD find the help they need? An understanding of the symptoms of PTSD is a good place to start. Some of the symptoms in children and teens are the same as those for [babies and toddlers](http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/07/12/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-babies-and-toddlers-what-are-the-symptoms/) (<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/07/12/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-babies-and-toddlers-what-are-the-symptoms/>). These include hypervigilance, emotional distress when reminded of the initial trauma, fear or avoidance of places that remind them of the event, nightmares, and other sleep issues.

But other symptoms are more common in children over the age of 3 and into the teen years. Today's focus is on those symptoms.

1 Flashbacks



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1. Flashbacks

Once they develop sophisticated language skills, children may begin to describe unexpected, intrusive thoughts about the initial trauma. This is common for the first few weeks or months after a trauma. But thoughts that continue long after that time period are a symptom of PTSD.

2. Physical Reaction

When reminded of the initial trauma, older children may complain of vague illnesses like stomachaches and headaches. The pain is very real to the child, even though no underlying cause can be diagnosed. Adults may discount the complaints as “all in the head,” when in truth, the complaints are a very real symptom of PTSD.

3. Denial of Event

Sometimes, children old enough to clearly remember a traumatic event vehemently deny it ever occurred. They would rather bury their pain than recall the reality of the trauma endured. Left buried and unprocessed, these painful mental wounds fester and develop into post-traumatic stress disorder. Children displaying this symptom need treatment, the sooner the better.

4. Difficulty Concentrating

Children suffering from PTSD are often misdiagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). What looks like ADHD is a response to trauma triggers. They respond with fear and try to move on to something that seems safer. When they encounter another trigger, they move on again.

5. Startle Easily

Depending on the type of trauma experienced, children may jump when they hear loud noises or become skittish in situations similar to the initial trauma. Children who have suffered physical abuse may flinch when an adult’s hand comes near the face.

6. A Foreshortened Sense of the Future

Lenore Terr documented this symptom in her book, *Too Scared to Cry* (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0465086446/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0465086446&linkCode=as2&tag=diffedream-20). The book describes interviews with 26 California school children who were kidnapped, buried alive, and eventually escaped in 1976. In periodic interviews after the trauma, Terr asked children what they wanted to be when they grew up. Many of them consistently answered that they didn’t bother thinking about that because they expected to die young.

7. Self-destructive Choices, Irritability, and Impulsiveness

These behaviors are often a direct, though unconscious, response to a child’s foreshortened sense of the future. Because kids with PTSD don’t think they’ll live long, why should they bother making safe choices? Why should they try to get along with anyone? Why should they save their money for the future? They feel like they have no future. So they make self-destructive choices, don’t try to maintain relationships, and act or spend impulsively.

8. Depression or an Overwhelming Sense of Sadness and Hopelessness

Again, this symptom has its roots in the foreshortened sense of the future mindset.

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(<http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nlurl=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=special+needs&tag=friendshipcircle-20>).



(<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/bactivity-guide/>)

The facility where [my son](http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/04/19/confessions-of-a-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-advocate/) (<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/04/19/confessions-of-a-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-advocate/>) received treatment, Intensive Trauma Therapy, Inc in West Virginia (<http://www.traumatherapy.us/>), referred to this symptom as “an impending sense of doom.” That mindset is the perfect environment for depression, sadness, and hopelessness to flourish.

Of course, many children without PTSD exhibit behaviors similar to the symptoms listed above. So when should parents or other adults who observe any of these symptoms in a child seek professional treatment?

- When they know [the child has experienced significant trauma](http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/01/08/10-causes-of-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-children/) (<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/01/08/10-causes-of-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-children/>) in the past, even the distant past.
- When the symptoms persist more than three months after the initial trauma.
- When adults suspect trauma occurred and have observed several symptoms.
- When the child’s behavior is significantly different from what is normal in other kids in the same age group.

Remember, treatment for children is highly effective. For more information about symptoms and treatment of PTSD in children, check out these resources:

Books on Post-Traumatic Stress disorder

1. **[Trauma Through a Child’s Eyes](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1556436300/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1556436300&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20)**
(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1556436300/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1556436300&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20) by Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline
2. **[Trauma-Proofing Your Kids](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1556436998/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1556436998&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20)**
(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1556436998/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1556436998&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20) by Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline
3. **[The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0465056539/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0465056539&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20)**
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4. **[Different Dream Parenting: A Practical Guide to Raising a Child with Special Needs](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1572934670/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=difedream-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1572934670)** (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1572934670/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=difedream-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1572934670) by Jolene Philo
5. **[Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1615215689/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1615215689&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20)**
(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1615215689/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1615215689&linkCode=as2&tag=difedream-20) by Jayne Schooler

WRITTEN ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2013 BY:

Jolene

(<https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/author/jolene>)

Jolene Philo's first child, Allen, was born with a life-threatening birth defect that required 7 surgeries from birth to age five. She taught students with special needs in a variety of settings during her 25 years in education. Her book, *Different Dream Parenting* (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1572934670/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=friecircspecn-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1572934670): A Practical Guide to Raising a Child with Special Needs was released by DHP in November of 2011. She also blogs about special needs at [www.DifferentDream.com](http://DifferentDream.com) (<http://DifferentDream.com>).

[View all 12 of Jolene's posts \(https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/author/jolene/\)](https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/author/jolene/).





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Name



Seanna • 5 years ago

I loved this article. Thank you so much for your advice. I truly appreciate it.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



J • a year ago

A few weeks ago I told my friend I had an impending sense of doom, which was the least of my problems. I have many of the symptoms but part of me worries that I'm just overreacting and making it more than what it needs to be. My problems are not as bad as other people's.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



DB → J • 10 months ago

while it may seem that others do have it worse, what is hard for you is personal to who you are. others may not be able to handle as much or less, you are you and don't lower yourself.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Mogs • 2 years ago

I was bullied from year 3 to year 5. And when I say bullied I mean BULLIED. They broke my wrist in year 5 in elementary (On purpose) They got me in trouble constantly, they caused me to start hurting myself, losing sleep, eating less, they also blackmailed me quite a lot. Through those 3 years 2 of my cats died from getting hit by a car, of course that didn't help.

They eventually stopped when I started ignoring them.

I get 1, 2, 4, and 5.

I hope I can get over this..

I wish everyone who has this can get over it

^ | v • Reply • Share >



J → Mogs • a year ago

I hope you feel a lot better. What they did was terrible. You don't deserve that. People like that have nothing better to do with themselves or their time.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Lupe Montelongo • 3 years ago

I had PTSD from the age of 10 due to a car accident that happened when riding with my father, but before I remember that before I was a very timid child, but I didn't feel no strong effects of fear during the day, only at nights, until the accident happened I felt a very strong panic attack and thereafter all what is involve with the PTSD condition; it was not notable to people around me only I felt haunted all the time, and I did told my parents about it, but they say " we don't see nothing wrong with you and they will not take me to be checked by professionals, so I took it from 10 until I was drafted at the US Marine Corps, and after being there for 2 months I suffered 2 seizures and night mares that I was taken in by the Military Paramedics to treat with medications (Valium injections, then oral tablets) I felt like I had been born again and I have been on Valium since then and for life.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



MargaritaO → Lupe Montelongo • 5 months ago

You have to get off the Valium step by step, slowly. Otherwise it can make you proper-crazy.

^ | v • Reply • Share >

ALSO ON FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCE BLOG

Special Needs Planning: Considerations for Extended Family

1 comment • 2 years ago



James Trott — Thanks for sharing such a wonderful blog. Surely, you have raised some mind boggling questions and i too, think it is very important to consider all the factors related to safety, privacy and diligence. These

Experts Answer Your Questions on Helping Kids with Autism Interact and Play

2 comments • 2 years ago



MARCUS — As far as the playing realize this that he will always be alone. Get over it and move on.

Four Reasons why you Might be Lonely if you are Caring for a Family Member with Mental Illness

2 comments • a year ago



Pogo Support — very nice share.....

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1 comment • a year ago



Skype Supports — thanks for sharing.....

PARENTING



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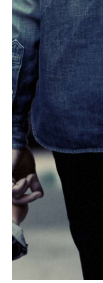


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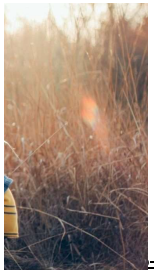
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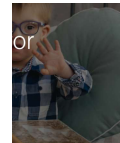
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