Family Services EAP…Your Bridge Between Home and Work

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

On the anniversary of 9/11, it is important to remember the powerful effect that traumatic events can have on our lives and our mental health. Traumatic events of all kinds, large and small, can cause people to struggle with severe emotional stress for a long time. In some cases, individuals who have experienced a traumatic event can develop a condition known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

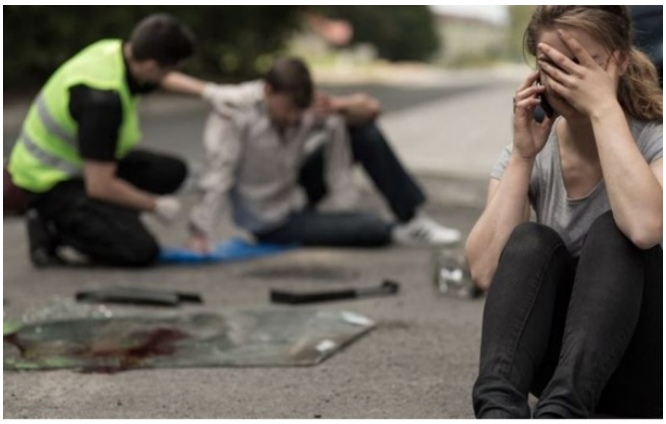
PTSD has been in the news in recent years as many veterans have struggled with the trauma of military service. However, most people with PTSD are not veterans. Violent crimes such as sexual assault and robberies, accidents and injuries, natural disasters, sudden significant loss, physical abuse, and even witnessing such events, call all result in PTSD.

What differentiates PTSD from other stress reactions is the severity and duration of the emotional symptoms. Frightening dreams, flashbacks , sleep problems, hypervigilance, and feeling disconnected or numb are all normal reactions to traumatic events. For most people, these symptoms gradually decrease over time. If you have PTSD, however, these symptoms don't decrease. In fact, they may get worse.

Research on the brain provides a very clear explanation of how traumatic events turn into PTSD. When a traumatic event occurs, our brains trigger our bodies to go into survival mode. All non-essential body functions are put on hold and stress hormones are released to prepare our bodies to fight, flee, or freeze. When the event is over, our brains signal our bodies to shift back into a restorative mode and stress hormones lessen. For the 20 percent of trauma survivors who develop PTSD, the shift from survival mode to restorative mode does not occur on its own. Essentially, the brain circuitry is stuck in a state of stress.

The good news is that, with professional treatment, we can re-wire the brain and return to healthy functioning. The following therapies have proven very effective in helping individuals recover from PTSD:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** is a style of talk-therapy that focuses on the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In CBT sessions, therapists help PTSD sufferers to identify and change unhelpful thoughts and feelings related to the trauma so they are not stuck in a negative thought loop.
- **Prolonged Exposure Therapy** is a type of CBT that teaches individuals to face trauma-related memories, feelings and situations and is especially effective for people who struggle with avoidance of anything that reminds them of the trauma they experienced.
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy** is another form of CBT that lasts 12 sessions and uses a very specific sequence of questions and worksheets to help individuals change their perception of the event, its causes and its consequences.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)** is a type of therapy that utilizes bilateral sensory input, such as side-to-side eye movements, which helps dampen the power of difficult memories, thoughts, and emotions related to past traumatic events.



PTSD can become a serious problem and dramatically affect someone's personal and professional life. For those reasons, it is important to seek treatment from a professional. That is why your employer is providing an EAP benefit. If you or a loved one is struggling with PTSD, or any other emotional stressor, call the EAP today: 978-327-6666 or send a confidential email to: info@familyserviceseap.org.