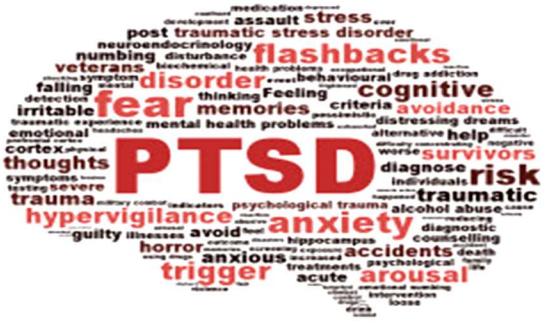

PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

When in the face of danger, it's natural to feel afraid. This fear triggers a stress response that immediately prepares the body to defend against or avoid danger. This "fight-or-flight" response is a healthy reaction meant to protect a person from harm. But in *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD), this reaction is changed or damaged. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened even when they're no longer in danger.

PTSD develops after a terrifying ordeal that involved physical harm or the threat of serious harm. The person who develops PTSD may have been the one who was harmed, the harm may have happened to a loved one, or the person may have witnessed a harmful event that happened to someone else.

PTSD can cause many symptoms, which fall into three types:

1. Re-experiencing: Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating, bad dreams, and frightening thoughts.

2. Avoidance : Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the experience.

Feeling emotionally numb. Feeling strong guilt, depression, or worry. Losing interest in activities that were enjoyable in the past. Having trouble remembering the dangerous event.

3. Hyperarousal: Being easily startled. Feeling tense or "on edge." Having difficulty sleeping, and/or having angry outbursts.

It's natural to have some of these symptoms after a dangerous event but if they last more than a few weeks and become an ongoing problem, they might be a sign of PTSD.

Remember to discuss any concerns, especially if symptoms persist beyond a few weeks, with your family doctor or licensed mental health counselor.

City of Milwaukee Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Anonymous online PTSD screening: http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/locator/ptsd/

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