



## Myths and Facts about PTSD

*Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Alliance was a multi-disciplinary group of professional and advocacy organizations, including Sidran Institute, that have joined forces to provide educational resources to medical and healthcare professionals, individuals diagnosed with PTSD and their loved ones, the general public, and the media. The mission of the PTSD Alliance is to increase awareness and promote a better understanding of the prevalence, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD.*

**Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a complex disorder that is often misunderstood. PTSD may develop following exposure to extreme trauma—a terrifying event or ordeal that a person has experienced, witnessed, or learned about a close family member or close friend. The trauma is life-threatening or causes physical harm. The experience causes that person to feel intense fear, horror, or a sense of helplessness. Not everyone who experiences a traumatic event will develop PTSD, but many people do.**

**MYTH:** PTSD only affects war veterans.

**FACT:** Although PTSD does affect war veterans, PTSD can affect anyone. Almost 70 percent of Americans will be exposed to a traumatic event in their lifetime. Of those people, up to 20 percent will go on to develop PTSD. An estimated 1 out of 9 women will develop PTSD at some time in their lives. Victims of trauma related to physical and sexual assault face the greatest risk of developing PTSD. Women are about twice as likely to develop PTSD as men, perhaps because women are more likely to experience trauma that involves these types of interpersonal violence, including rape and severe beatings. Victims of domestic violence and childhood abuse are at tremendous risk for PTSD.

**MYTH:** People should be able to move on with their lives after a traumatic event. Those who can't cope are weak.

**FACT:** Many people who experience an extremely traumatic event go through an adjustment period following the exposure. Most of these people are able to return to leading a normal life. However, the stress caused by trauma can affect all aspects of a person's life including mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Research suggests that prolonged trauma may disrupt and alter brain chemistry. For some people, a traumatic event changes their views about

themselves and the world around them. This may lead to the development of PTSD.

**MYTH:** People suffer from PTSD right after they experience a traumatic event.

**FACT:** PTSD symptoms usually develop within the first three months after trauma, but may not appear until months or years have passed. These symptoms may continue for years following the trauma, or, in some cases, symptoms may subside and reoccur later in life, which is often the case with victims of childhood abuse. Some people don't recognize that they have PTSD because they may not associate their current symptoms with past trauma. In domestic violence situations, the victim may not realize that their prolonged, constant exposure to abuse puts them at risk.