



**COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:**  
**TIPS FOR MANAGING POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS**

**Version 1, 4/28/20**

For many people, the outbreak of COVID-19 is causing stress and heightened anxiety. For those who are exposed (directly or indirectly) to actual or potential death, or serious illness in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, posttraumatic stress symptoms may develop. These symptoms may include distressing memories or dreams about a traumatic event, feeling especially anxious or on edge, having problems with sleeping, or even experiencing other kinds of persistent negative mood and/or emotional states (e.g., irritability, sadness, guilt). In addition, more recent traumatic events can sometimes lead us to think more about very stressful and traumatic events from the past, even when these events are unrelated. Although experiencing posttraumatic stress immediately following trauma is normal and typically goes away over time without a need for intervention, some individuals will go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). To help build resilience, promote healing after exposure to trauma, and reduce the chances of developing PTSD, here are some tips for those experiencing posttraumatic stress. Helpful resources are also included.

**Manage Your Distress After You Experience a Trauma**

- Seek support from loved ones
- Work hard to overcome any urges to withdraw socially
- Talk with people you trust about the trauma
  - Tell them about what happened
  - Share how it impacted you emotionally
- Keep up with your normal routines as much as possible, especially activities you typically find pleasurable, rewarding, or meaningful
- Master a skill – makes you feel strong, more confident, and more in control
  - Get better at something you already are good at
  - Learn something new
  - Achieve a task on a To-Do list
- Resist the urge to avoid trauma reminders
  - Do not push away memories of the trauma or stay away from people, places, and things you associate with the trauma
  - Allow yourself to experience the feelings you have related to the trauma



- (e.g., guilt, sadness, anger)
- Accept your feelings – acknowledge and learn from your pain, do not deny it
  - Think of yourself as a survivor rather than as a victim
  - Say things to validate yourself (e.g., “I can manage this” or “It makes sense that I’m feeling this way”) when you have challenging symptoms
    - Remember, stress is a normal response to abnormal experiences and self-validation is important for healing
  - Use coping techniques (e.g., mindful meditation, deep breathing) to activate your body’s relaxation response when you feel so tense or anxious that it’s hard to get anything done
    - Remember, it is okay to turn the volume down on your memories and associated feelings so you can reach a goal or complete a task
    - Refer to the “Helpful Apps for Effective Coping” resource for apps that help with relaxation and stress reduction
  - Remind yourself that you have coped with difficult situations in the past and can cope with this situation
  - Think about what you have learned, or may learn, from trauma
    - Ask yourself, “am I stronger than I usually give myself credit for?”
    - Reflect on things in your life for which you feel thankful
  - Reach out to a mental health professional if you are struggling significantly with posttraumatic stress
    - Access teletherapy services during COVID-19
    - Consult directories for trauma-informed therapy options

### **Helpful Resources**

- The Anxiety and Depression Association of America: <https://adaa.org/>
  - “How to Prevent Trauma from Becoming PTSD” by Debra Kissen & Michelle Lozano: <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-prevent-trauma-becoming-ptsd>



- Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy “Trauma Fact Sheets” (Information and Therapist Directory): [http://www.abct.org/Information/?m=mlInformation&-fa=fs\\_TRAUMA](http://www.abct.org/Information/?m=mlInformation&-fa=fs_TRAUMA)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Information and Therapist Directory for Children, Adolescents, and Families): <https://www.nctsn.org/>
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Therapist Directory for Children and Adolescents): <https://tfcbt.org/>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD (Information and Therapist Directory): <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- Understanding and Managing Emotions Elicited by the COVID-19 Pandemic: <http://www.unifiedprotocol.com/SiteData/docs/HandoutEmo/5e787c9e1a972cac/Handout%20-%20Emotions%20&%20COVID-19.pdf>