

## How Can I Get Help?

If you or your family member exhibits some of the above PTSD symptoms, consult your family doctor and ask for an appropriate mental health evaluation and treatment.

You and your family member may be eligible to receive mental health services from the County Mental Health Plan. The County has a toll free number available 24 hours a day, which is staffed with mental health specialists who can assess your needs and make appropriate referrals. They will be able to talk with you in your preferred language.

Their services and phone numbers are listed in the county government pages of your local phone book.



## Where Can I Get More Information?

National Institute of Mental Health  
(888) 826-9438  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Mental Health Association  
(800) 969-6642  
<http://www.nmha.org>

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
(800)-950-6264  
<http://www.nami.org>

Anxiety Disorders Assoc. of America  
(240) 485-1001  
<http://www.adaa.org>



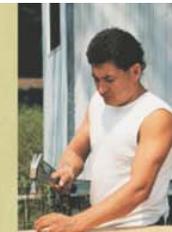
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**Behavioral Wellness**

A System of Care and Recovery

1-888-868-1649

Partial funding provided by the California Department of Mental Health.

AVI productions - Monzon producer  
Graphic design - C & M Villagran



**ADULT POST-TRAUMATIC  
STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**



## What Is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) refers to the emotional, behavioral and physiological disturbances that can develop sometime after exposure to an extreme trauma. For example, traumatic events include rape or sexual assault, physical assault, witnessing a murder or experiencing serious injury, or mass destruction due to a natural disaster or war. Individuals who have been victimized or have witnessed such extreme traumatic events are at risk for developing PTSD.

Not everyone who experiences or observes a life-threatening event will develop PTSD. Some people recover without any treatment and others may not develop PTSD until years after the traumatic event. However, if left untreated, the disorder can impair one's work, school, and social functioning.

In addition to an evaluation by a mental health professional, most of the time a medical evaluation by a physician is necessary to rule out potential physical health causes of the symptoms.

### What Are the Signs of PTSD?

A person with PTSD may exhibit the following symptoms for a prolonged period of time:

- Repeatedly relives the traumatic event through



flashbacks, memories, nightmares or frightening thoughts

- Feels detached from emotional states; demonstrates emotional numbness
- Has trouble sleeping
- Avoids any situation that might cause him or her to relive the trauma
- Shows an increased sense of being on guard and alert

A person who experiences PTSD may show signs of other emotional troubles such as having a sense of hopelessness, depression, irritability and outbursts of anger. Some may start to use alcohol, marijuana and other sedative drugs to cope. It is also common for people with PTSD to have physical complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, muscle aches, dizziness, and chest pain.

### What Causes Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

The precise cause of post-traumatic stress disorder is not fully understood. In general, mental disorders result from a combination of genetic factors, other biological factors, and environmental factors. The

influence between biology and environment is complicated. The brain influences behavior, and experience affects the development of the brain.

PTSD symptoms are triggered by a traumatic event. Research indicates that people who have had previous traumatic experiences (e.g., child abuse, serious injury in disaster, or war) are likely to develop PTSD.

Other studies show there are specific brain areas that are responsible for PTSD symptoms such as fear and anxiety, and intrusive thoughts and memories.

### How Is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Treated?

The treatment for PTSD includes therapy and/or medication.

With the help of a counselor, the person with PTSD can examine and review the traumatic events of the past and learn to understand and cope with his or her feelings of fear and anxiety.

Medication can help to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and to promote sleep.

With adequate treatment, some will recover within a few months, while others may take longer-sometimes a year or more-to recover from PTSD.

