



**Center for
Survivors of
Torture**

**PTSD
POST-TRAUMATIC
STRESS DISORDER**

Asian Americans for
Community Involvement



www.aaci.org

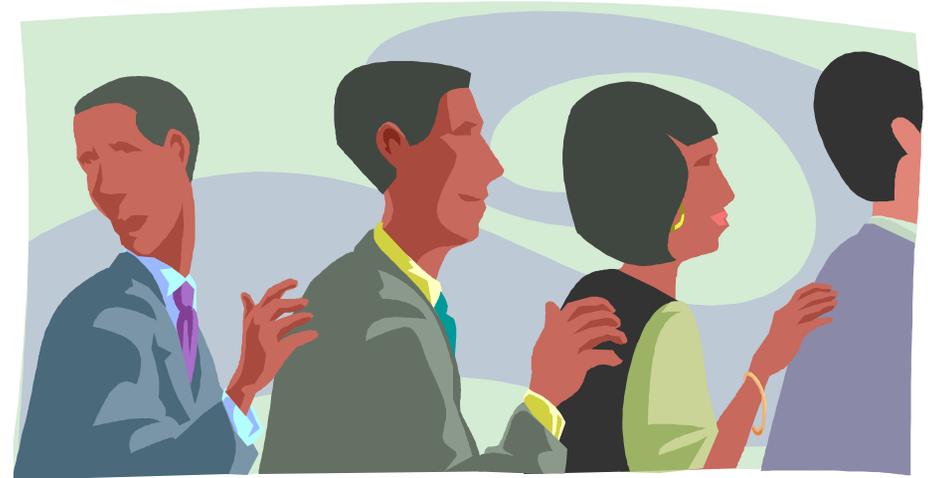
So . . . Survivors of Torture Are Strong?

Yes. Even if they don't know it yet.

Learn to recognize PTSD in yourself and others

Seek Professional Help if you or someone you know has a problem

Support Community Programs for PTSD survivors and their families.



Help to End the Cycle of Shame and Isolation.

You are not responsible for what was done to you in the past...but you are responsible for changing your future.

WE CAN HELP

CST

Center for Survivors of Torture

 Asian Americans for Community Involvement

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experience).

WHAT IS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

It's an emotional and psychological reaction to trauma (a painful, shocking



TRAUMA CAN HAVE A LASTING EFFECT

After severe trauma, many survivors feel their lives have changed forever. What once seemed a safe and good world may suddenly seem dangerous and unpredictable.

❑ BE SYMPATHETIC



Listen when the survivor needs to talk. Torturers often tell their victims that no one will believe them, or want to hear their story.

❑ SHARE EVERYDAY CHORES

Help with shopping, cleaning, child care, etc. but don't take over all responsibilities for the survivor. They are strong people who may feel helpless, but are not.

❑ BE INVOLVED

Become a resource for those who want to know more about PTSD. Speak out against genocide and torture. Educate others about different cultures.



❑ TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Find someone you can talk with, too. Sharing someone's trauma can be difficult, but powerful and positive for you as well.



WHO IS LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM PTSD?

Anyone who experiences or witnesses a traumatic event. PTSD can affect survivors of events such as

TORTURE AND WAR

The violence of war affects both military personnel and civilians

VIOLENT ATTACKS AND RAPE

Survivors often fear another attack

CAR OR PLANE ACCIDENTS

Many survivors lose trust in modern technology

NATURAL DISASTERS

Some survivors of hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc., worry that nature will strike again

SUICIDE OR MURDER

People who witness these tragic events may feel angry, hurt, or helpless



Anyone who has suffered a life-changing trauma can develop PTSD. PTSD is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Having PTSD is not a reflection on how smart or educated you are, how sane you are, or how strong you are.

YOU CAN HELP EASE PTSD

❑ SELF-CARE



Many survivors are used to taking care of others, and find it difficult to practice self-care. Ways of being kind to yourself could include taking a bath,

going for a walk, seeing a friend or indulging in some treat.

❑ TALK ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

At your own pace, and with support, talking about what happened is the best way to process the trauma. Survivors fear if they talk about what happened, they will feel worse. In fact, the opposite is true. Sharing with others is powerful.



❑ AVOID SELF-MEDICATING

It can be tempting to “check out” with alcohol, drugs, or food. This is not a good long term solution, and causes even more stress.

Some Survivors Have Trouble Opening Up

They can't talk about their problems because of guilt and shame.

Torture survivors may:



- ❑ Minimize or deny the impact of rape or sexual assault as a form of torture
- ❑ Feel they must remain silent to protect their family
- ❑ Feel shame because they lost control over their lives during the torture

What you are feeling is normal, given what you have experienced. You are not “crazy” or “weak” or “stupid” or permanently “damaged” or “broken” ---- you are human.



SURVIVORS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THEY'RE NOT TO BLAME

for what happened to them. Talking about their feelings with family, friends, or professionals can help.



PTSD CAN BE TREATED

Depending on the individual, and their culture, treatment may include:

INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

Survivors resolve problems with the help of a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health specialist.

FAMILY THERAPY

All members of the family work together toward recovery.

GROUP THERAPY

Survivors meet and bond with others who have experienced similar traumas.

MEDICATION THERAPY

Some symptoms of PTSD can be treated quite effectively with medication, under professional supervision.

THE USE OF ANTI-DEPRESSANTS (SSRIs)



Do you blame a Baby for needing milk? A diabetic for needing Insulin? Someone with Cancer receiving radiation? Of course not.

PTSD should be thought of in those terms---your body needs something now to help regulate itself. It is a normal part of treatment.

preoccupied with it Most of all,, these children struggle with fears that they are still not safe.

“My Teenager is an American now.”

Your adolescent or teen may distance themselves from your country or your family situation. Young



people adapt to the English language and American culture much more easily. They may deny they know or care about the past. They may act out in anger at their parents for having more visible grief. They may try to become “the perfect child” at school and

home in order to take care of their families.

Most survivors of torture and war either tell their



children too much about the trauma or too little. Families are either flooded with images and memories overheard in adult conversation or left with a silence that means “we don’t talk about that, ever”. Either way, children and teens can

feel helpless and afraid.



RECOVERY TAKES TIME...

Recovery from trauma is a process--- you will heal, given the proper treatment and understanding.

You set your own pace in trauma therapy---

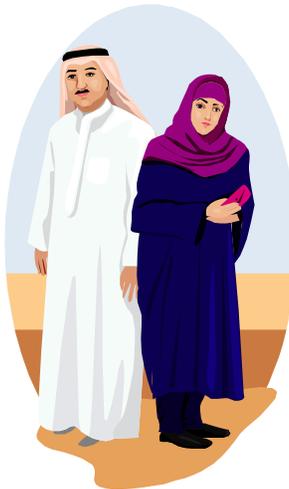
healing happens in stages, which include



FEAR AND SADNESS



Survivors often fear the event will happen again. Refugees are particularly afraid of being sent back to the country they were tortured. They may feel sad and helpless over the loss of trust in themselves—and the world.



DENIAL

Some survivors with PTSD may deny that the trauma has had any effect on them—or they may deny that certain

SURVIVORS OF TORTURE AND WAR GENERALLY FIND THEMSELVES...

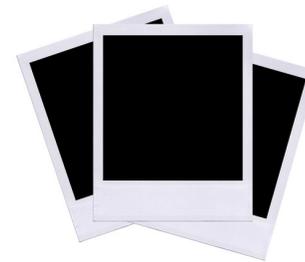
REEXPERIENCING THE TRAUMA

This may include:

- ❑ Recurrent Memories or flashbacks — often, survivors can't stop reliving the trauma in their mind, or predict when such memories will return. These memories often play like movie images, played over and over again.



- ❑ Nightmares — survivors with PTSD may recall their trauma nightly in their sleep. Night is almost always a difficult time for survivors for several reasons. Often, atrocities are committed at night. Night is dark and disorienting. The rest of the world is asleep



and there is nothing to distract the survivor as during the daytime (work, socializing, family, household chores).



EMOTIONAL NUMBING

Survivors with PTSD may experience:

- ❑ Depression — feelings of sadness, hopelessness and loneliness can last a long time
- ❑ Lack of interest — survivors with PTSD may no longer enjoy family, activities, hobbies and friends.
- ❑ "Survivor Guilt" — some people with PTSD feel guilty for surviving when so many others did not.



INCREASED IRRITABILITY

This may include:

- ❑ Insomnia — fear of nightmares can make people anxious about sleeping at all.
- ❑ Jumpiness — most survivors become unable to relax. They feel constantly "on guard," and try to avoid situations that remind them of the trauma

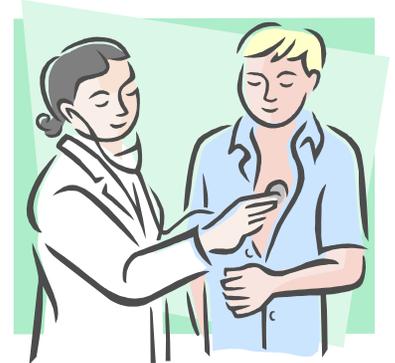


HOW DOES MY BODY REACT TO TRAUMA?

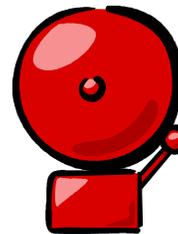
Trauma is felt just as much in the body as in the mind.

Physical Symptoms

- Somatic Reactions
- Muscle Tension
- Aches and Pains
- Rapid Heartbeat
- Breathing Difficulties
- Sweating, Trembling
- Dizziness
- Impaired Immune System



Your body is in a constant state of tension, like a fire alarm that can't be shut off.



Many survivors go to the emergency room with panic symptoms, believing they are having a heart attack. They think they might have cancer, or a tumor, because they physically feel so bad. They feel confused and afraid, even when others tell them they are safe.

SOME SURVIVORS HAVE TROUBLE REACHING OUT

During your trauma, you could not fight, you could not flee. Many survivors "freeze" and continue to feel frozen, helpless and unable to move forward, no matter how hard you try.

SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

May occur immediately or shortly after the trauma. They often come and go for years, even decades, if they remain untreated.



HOW MIGHT YOU FEEL PHYSICALLY?

- Trouble sleeping, Nightmares
- Low Energy/Fatigue
- Frequent Illness, Aches and Pains
- Hypervigilance, Easily Startled
- Impaired Memory
- Lack of Concentration



HOW MIGHT YOU FEEL EMOTIONALLY?

- Scared
- Angry
- Hopeless
- Helpless
- Confused
- Panicked
- Numb
- Unable to Trust in Others

These feelings are like a radio with the volume turned all the way up---survivors feel they can't adjust the volume, or control their lives.



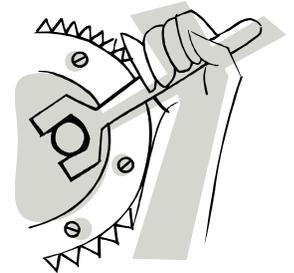
SYMPTOMS THAT LAST FOR MORE THAN ONE MONTH are necessary for a diagnosis of PTSD. These symptoms often cause survivors to:

- Develop conflicts with people
- Abuse alcohol or other drugs
- Isolate themselves

things happened at all.

WORKING THROUGH FEARS

Survivors can learn to recognize their fears and anxieties---and how to overcome them.



GROWTH



Eventually, most survivors accept the changes in their lives caused by trauma. Many feel stronger than every before.

“YOU ARE NOT ALONE!”

The recovery process includes exploring feelings, learning how to contain feelings so they are more manageable, developing coping skills, accessing strengths, and coming to know you are not alone. Recovery is a marathon and not a sprint---your treatment team is with you for the long haul





CHILDREN SUFFER FROM TRAUMA TOO!

Children may experience PTSD as a result of these same events, as well as from child abuse, physical abuse or the death of a parent.

Children from families who have experienced torture or war are always affected, whether they seem “okay” or not.



Survivors who are parents often want to believe

“ My child was too young to remember”

Perhaps. But children retain memory as young as age two, especially when it is a significant event. Many children remember trauma but cannot discuss it in words as adults can. They may act out their memories in play or art. They may withdraw and turn inward. They may refuse to talk about the past, or become



SOURCES OF HELP

Survivors can find help in a number of places...



MENTAL HEALTH OR PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

offer a wide range of low cost or no cost treatments.



SOCIAL SERVICES

are available to everyone in the United States



TORTURE SURVIVOR CENTERS

that specialize in treating survivors of torture and genocide. Torture is a very specific trauma that needs special treatment, much like a person with a heart condition needs a cardiologist, not a general practitioner.

SURVIVORS OF TORTURE AND GENOCIDE

Even the strongest person can be broken by torture---that's the purpose of torture.



Anyone can be a victim of torture—children and adults, young or old, religious or atheist, political or not. No one is immune.

Frequent victims are politicians, activists, journalists, health professionals, people in detention or prison,

members of ethnic minorities and student leaders.

Victims of torture do not suffer alone. In most cases, their families and friends are also targeted and affected. Their whole community may live in fear. The use of torture sends a strong warning to those within a political, social, or religious opposition.

Perpetrators may include:

- ❑ Prison officers
- ❑ Military
- ❑ Death squads
- ❑ Government officials
- ❑ Health professionals

❑ EAT RIGHT AND EXERCISE



You can help relieve anxiety and depression through diet and exercise. Emotional stress puts extra demands on your physical health.

❑ STAY INVOLVED

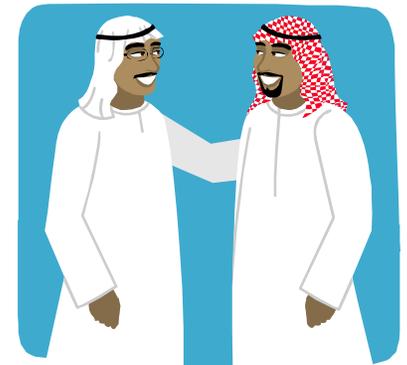
It may feel as if you will never “be the same” again, as if you will never be happy again. Spend time with people who reinforce that, little by little, you will feel better and better.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS PLAY A BIG PART IN RECOVERY

You can help if a family member or friend is a survivor of torture.

❑ BE SUPPORTIVE

Encourage—but don't nag - the survivor to get help. Try to be understanding. Continue to give your love and support even if the survivor tries to push you away.





WHY SHOULD I LEARN ABOUT PTSD?

Because you or someone you know may experience trauma at some time in your life!

Learning about PTSD can help you:

COPE WITH TRAUMA



and post-traumatic stress disorder. This is especially important when trauma begins to affect you:

- personal relationships
- social life
- work or school

HELP OTHERS



who might be struggling to recover after trauma. You may be able to provide help to:

- family members
- co-workers
- friends
- people in your church, mosque or temple



SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Am I crazy?

No. No. And No. What was done to you was “crazy”. You are having a normal reaction to horrific trauma. You are human.

Do people with PTSD have to be hospitalized?

Most cases of PTSD can be treated on an outpatient basis. Torture survivors have an understandable fear of being held against their will or “locked up”. We do everything to avoid hospitalization. But if a person is at risk of hurting themselves or someone else, our job is to protect you.

Is treatment expensive?

CST provides low cost or no cost treatment. If you have health insurance, or other state funding, they may cover some or all of the costs as well.

Will I ever be the same again?

We wish there was a magic pill that could erase everything you’ve been through. You may never be the same again, but you can still lead a full, healthy and happy life.

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Center for Survivors of Torture

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