



Supporting staff with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder caused by exposure to very stressful, frightening or distressing events. These events include experiencing threat or attack on life, mind and/or body, or witnessing the harm, distress or death of another.

Repeated exposure to traumatic events can result in a type of PTSD known as Complex PTSD.

Most people will experience a period of acute stress after a traumatic event. Where this persists or occurs some time after the event, the individual may be experiencing PTSD.

Common symptoms of PTSD

No two people with PTSD have the same experience, and symptoms can vary over time.

The most common core symptoms of PTSD at work include:

- Strong feelings of fear, anxiety and perceived danger which may result in panic attacks
- Difficulty concentrating, and retaining information
- Fatigue and low energy levels
- Irritability, easily startled and/or being easily moved to tears
- Tendency to isolate from others, feeling disconnected from the world

Complex PTSD can have additional symptoms such as:

- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Difficulty in trusting others
- Experiencing physical aches and pains

How can staff get assessed?

Formal diagnosis is usually made by psychiatric assessment via GP referral.

Reasonable adjustments at work

Effective adjustments will be specific to individuals. Ask the person what they find harder to do or to manage, and what has helped previously if appropriate. Adjustments to be considered include:

- Scheduling regular check-in meetings to keep the individual feeling connected, and to identify any further support needs;
- Agreeing on signs that an individual may need to take a break, or to leave work for the day;
- Identifying and reducing any workplace triggers that increase stress and anxiety, such as changes to the work environment or location, and/or reallocation of duties for an appropriate time period;
- Enabling flexible working to accommodate treatment, the effects of any medications, and allow for short breaks during the working day;
- Using dividers between desks or providing noise-cancelling headphones to aid concentration;
- Locating an individual's desk where they can see people approaching, away from the flow of office traffic, and ideally near an exit;
- Understanding that an individual may have to leave a situation suddenly;
- Providing a safe space to talk if the individual wishes to, understanding that symptoms may 'flare up' during or after discussions, and knowing where to access support for yourself.

Sources of support:

Occupational Health - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/occupational-health>

Staff Counselling - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/counselling-services/staff>

PTSD UK - <https://www.ptsduk.org/>