



Work Smart Live Smart

Posttraumatic Stress In An Age Of Uncertainty

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Stress, depression, and anxiety. We know that they can have profound effects on our health and the lives of those around us. And now we are hearing more about Posttraumatic Stress. What is it, and what can be done about it?

In light of the times we have faced and the continuous stories that are sure to affect us, the need for taking care of ourselves physically and mentally becomes even more paramount. Our lives can become filled with anxiety, fear, and uncertainty and with little information on where to turn we find ourselves struggling on our own. The key to prevention is in information and effective support.

Traumatic events can bring about this extreme stress disorder, whether it be living through an earthquake, surviving childhood abuse, or witnessing violent acts of terrorism. Posttraumatic Stress can seemingly creep into our lives when we least expect it.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is characterized by the re-experiencing of traumatic events, increased physical symptoms, and/or by persistent avoidance of certain situations. These symptoms must begin to occur at least one month after the original traumatic situation for a clear diagnosis of PTSD.

The past events of terrorism may have brought back memories for other victims of war. Those who have had to leave their home country because of persecution and violence may be re-experiencing the extreme fear and anxiety that they originally experienced, even though they are now not in danger. Individuals who work in our major cities may be feeling anxiety, and even fear when they enter their own place of work due to past terrorist events. They may be having trouble sleeping, concentrating, and may be seemingly on-edge. If these feelings and symptoms worsen and persist they too may be experiencing PTSD.

This illness is not new. We have called it 'Shell Shock' amongst other names. Some soldiers in past World Wars were diagnosed with experiencing the same symptoms of feeling detached from their lives and society, using alcohol to avoid remembering their awful memories, and having nightmares so extreme that they would rather stay awake for days than fall deep into that horror.

Can it be avoided? There are strategies that can be used, but there are no guarantees. When we have experienced a traumatic event our brain's ability to process and recover can

determine whether or not we are going to fall to Posttraumatic Stress. Treatment depends on the severity and persistence of symptoms. Support, debriefing, therapy, and medications have all been shown to be effective.

We do know that having the opportunity to share your feelings and memories with others who have also experienced similar tragedies can be helpful in processing and recovering from a trauma. We are now putting this information to task as many police and fire departments have developed Critical Incidence Stress Support Teams to help our emergency personnel through their difficult tasks.

In uncertain times, we need to take care of ourselves, remember the important things in life, keep our perspective, and rely on others. We must develop our supports as they can provide a protective barrier. Talk to friends and family about your fears. If they seem overwhelming contact your doctor or a counselor. Your workplace Human Resources Department or Employee Assistance Program may also be a valuable support. The Canadian Mental Health Association (www.cmha.ca) has a wide variety of pamphlets that can also be helpful to provide you with valuable information.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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