



kids therapy made simple

# PTSD in Children

## Veterans are not the only ones who experience PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is diagnosed in an individual who has experienced or witnessed an extremely emotional, mental or physical trauma. Symptoms can emerge as early as three months after the event, or may take up to a year to surface.

Symptoms experienced by adults and children can be very similar, however, the main difference is that adults are usually better able to verbalize how they are feeling and what they are experiencing.

Children have a more difficult time recognizing that the frightening thoughts and sensations they may be experiencing as memories or flashbacks of the trauma are not real.

PTSD symptoms can manifest much differently in infants and toddlers due to limited verbal expression. In these cases, it is important to look at the infant or toddler's behaviors.

It's normal for some behaviors to occur in the first weeks following a traumatic event. However, if these behaviors continue for more than 3 months, treatment may be needed.

## Events that could cause PTSD:

Severe car accident	Natural or man-made disaster
Being a victim or witness to violence or a crime	Serious illness or death of a close family member or friend
Physical, emotional or sexual abuse	Serious injury or medical procedure

## Symptoms typically experienced by children with PTSD

### Re-experiencing the trauma

- nightmares • having "flashbacks" where they feel they are going through the experience again • re-enacting trauma through play, drawings, writings or conversations

### Avoidance

- avoiding situations that make them recall the traumatic event • "blocking out" the trauma - having difficulty remembering it • decreased interest or participation in significant activities such as play • emotional numbness

### Increased Agitation

- being "on guard" or "on edge" • easily startled or frightened
  - unable to fall or stay asleep • problems with concentration • irritability, angry or aggressive behavior, including temper tantrums • fear of being separated from caregiver • out-of-control, disruptive behavior
- physical complaints such as stomachache or headache

## Treating PTSD in Children

### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- trauma-focused in that the trauma is the center of the therapeutic process
- focuses on identifying, understanding, and changing thinking and behavior patterns

### Play Therapy

- works with young children who are unable to verbalize or communicate their understanding and reactions to the trauma
- interventions including art and games are used

### Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

- therapist guides child through concentrating on traumatic memory while incorporating guided eye movements
- rapid eye movement (which happens during dreaming) is thought to speed up the healing process

### Medication

- no medication "cures" PTSD, however, sometimes medications can be used to relieve symptoms while the child is also seeing a therapist