

Types of PTSD

National Center for PTSD

There are five main types of post-traumatic stress disorder: normal stress response, acute stress disorder, uncomplicated [PTSD](#), comorbid PTSD and complex PTSD.

Normal Stress Response

The normal stress response occurs when healthy adults who have been exposed to a single discrete traumatic event in adulthood experience intense bad memories, emotional numbing, feelings of unreality, being cut off from relationships or bodily tension and distress. Such individuals usually achieve complete recovery within a few weeks. Often a group debriefing experience is helpful. Debriefings begin by describing the traumatic event. They then progress to exploration of survivors' emotional responses to the event. Next, there is an open discussion of symptoms that have been precipitated by the [trauma](#). Finally, there is education in which survivors' responses are explained and positive ways of coping are identified.

Acute Stress disorder

Acute stress disorder is characterized by [panic](#) reactions, mental confusion, dissociation, severe insomnia, suspiciousness, and being unable to manage even basic self care, work, and relationship activities. Relatively few survivors of single traumas have this more severe reaction, except when the trauma is a lasting catastrophe that exposes them to death, destruction, or loss of home and community. Treatment includes immediate support, removal from the scene of the trauma, use of medication for immediate relief of grief, [anxiety](#), and insomnia, and brief supportive [psychotherapy](#) provided in the context of crisis intervention.

Uncomplicated PTSD

Uncomplicated PTSD involves persistent reexperiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, emotional numbing, and symptoms of increased arousal. It may respond to group, psychodynamic, [cognitive-behavioral](#), pharmacological, or combination approaches.

Comorbid PTSD

PTSD comorbid with other psychiatric disorders is actually much more common than uncomplicated PTSD. PTSD is usually associated with at least one other major psychiatric disorder such as [depression](#), alcohol or substance abuse, panic disorder, and other anxiety disorders. The best results are achieved when both PTSD and the other disorder(s) are treated together rather than one after the other. This is especially true for PTSD and alcohol or substance abuse. The same treatments used for uncomplicated PTSD should be used for these patients, with the addition of carefully managed treatment for the other psychiatric or addiction problems.

Complex PTSD

Complex PTSD (sometimes called “Disorder of Extreme Stress”) is found among individuals who have been exposed to prolonged traumatic circumstances, especially during [childhood](#), such as childhood sexual abuse. These individuals often are diagnosed with borderline or antisocial personality disorder or dissociative disorders. They exhibit behavioral difficulties (such as impulsivity, aggression, sexual acting out, eating disorders, alcohol or drug abuse, and self-destructive actions), extreme emotional difficulties (such as intense rage, depression, or panic) and mental difficulties (such as fragmented thoughts, dissociation, and amnesia). The treatment of such patients often takes much longer, may progress at a much slower rate, and requires a sensitive and highly structured treatment program delivered by a team of trauma specialists.