**Some Information on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Post → “after”

Traumatic → “significantly distressing”

Stress → “tension”

Disorder → “disturbance”

To be traumatized means that a person has experienced an intensely negative emotional reaction to a stressful event. PTSD is a normal reaction abnormal events. If you experience intense fear, helplessness, or horror from an act of violence, you may have PTSD. Extreme stress and trauma produce the same kind of reactions in everyone. PTSD is marked by an overwhelming feeling of anxiety during and after the trauma.

Immediate symptoms (which can be ongoing) of PTSD include:

* Intrusion – the trauma comes back into your mind even when you don’t want it to, in nightmares, flashbacks, or images
* Avoidance – feeling detached, emotionally numb, avoiding any reminders of the trauma
* Arousal – feeling ‘hyped-up’ (e.g., easily startled, sleep problems, anger)
* Lower Functioning – problems with relationships, work, or other major areas of life

Long-term symptoms can include feelings of guilt, loss of trust and faith, being damaged, shame, and anger. Problems with memory, relationships, health, and sexuality can occur as well as dissociation and thoughts of self-harm.

If you experience any of these symptoms after experiencing a trauma, you may have PTSD. Only a mental health care professional can make the diagnosis of PTSD. f you have any of these symptoms, you are encouraged to meet with a mental health care professional.

Three Stages of Healing from PTSD

1. **Safety**: The goal is to understand and gain control over your feelings, learn to cope with day-to-day matters, protect yourself, increase your functioning, and attain stability.
2. **Mourning**: You may need to grieve about the traumatic event. You may need to cry deeply to get over the pain you experienced.
3. **Reconnection**: After letting yourself experience grief, you will find yourself more able to reconnect with the world in joyful ways: thriving, enjoying life, able to enjoy work and relate well to others.

To heal from PTSD

* Name the symptoms you are experiencing
* View and treat yourself and your symptoms with the highest compassion
* Explore strengths you have that arose from the adversity
* Develop healthy and safe coping strategies to manage your symptoms and triggers
* Know that you are not alone

Modified from Najavits, L. M. (2002). *Seeking safety: A treatment manual for PTSD and substance abuse*. NY: Guiliford Press. With thanks to Walnut Avenue Family & Women’s Center.