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Fear and Anger in PTSD

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Topic Overview

After a traumatic event, you may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). You may not feel close to people, or you may feel on edge. Your friends and family may tell you that you don't seem the same. You may feel angry.

Anger is a normal response to a traumatic event. Anger gives you the energy to act quickly and help yourself or others. Your body goes into a "survival" mode. After the event, when you no longer need to act, your anger goes away.

But if you have PTSD, your anger may get out of control. This means you lose your temper and may feel like harming others or yourself.

When you have PTSD, you can get stuck in a "ready to act" mode. Your anger is always there, just under the surface. When something bothers you, you may not think about the situation before acting. You go into survival mode, and your anger flares up.

If you are stuck in this mode, you may:

- Always be on alert. You may be quick to get angry, and look for situations where you have to be alert or where you could be hurt.
- Feel that anger is the best way to solve problems. You don't look for other ways, such as talking things over.
- Feel threatened and fearful about things that may not be dangerous.

What you can do

Here are some ideas for dealing with your anger:

- Talk to your doctor about getting counseling. A type of counseling called anger management can help you deal with your anger.
- If you start feeling mad around your family, try being alone for a while. Tell your partner you need to cool down for a while, or that it would be better to discuss a problem later. This can keep an argument from building into a fight.

- If what someone says makes you angry, try to understand his or her point of view. Then tell the person your point of view. Try to understand and be understood.
- Don't keep your feelings bottled up. This can make you feel worse. Try to:
 - Talk with someone you trust.
 - Write down your feelings. It may help to make a list of things that are bothering you. Decide which things you can change, and how you can change them.
 - Exercise, draw, paint, or listen to music to release the anger.
- Watch for situations that make you angry and try to work around them. For example:
 - If you have trouble dealing with heavy traffic, try to adjust your work schedule so that you don't have to travel in peak traffic hours.
 - If standing in line bothers you, do errands when stores are not so busy.
- Relax by using techniques such as yoga, meditation, or tai chi.

For more information, see the topic Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Credits

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Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



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