

Symptoms of PTSD from Domestic Violence

Helen wanders through her day wondering why she feels the way she does. It has been months since she left her abusive relationship. Although she is no longer dealing with the abuse 24/7, she still feels like she is losing her mind. Triggers happen throwing her back into fearful remembrances. She asks why this is happening to her.

She begins to have panic attacks in random places like the grocery store. She notices a couple having a disagreement. Consciously she quickens her steps and heads for the checkout line trembling. Sometimes the panic attacks are so severe she ends up in the emergency room thinking she is having a heart attack.

She notices fear rises when she spots a particular model and color of car. She remembers the times she has been left on the side of the road abandoned by her partner. Filled with anxiety, she refuses to drive on a highway and chooses back roads. Panic sets in whenever she is a passenger in a car that is traveling on an expressway.

Helen like many others who experience domestic abuse or abusive relationships suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This can last years. Sometimes the severity diminishes over time. Being unfamiliar with PTSD, women can think that they are going crazy.

It is important to be aware of the effects of trauma whether it is physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse. The identification of symptoms is crucial. Those with PTSD may exhibit a number of the symptoms but not all.

- Nightmares about an past or possible incidences of abuse

- Sleeplessness, disruptive sleep patterns, difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep
- Waking up drench in sweat
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Nervousness, jumpy
- Memory flashbacks of past incidences that occur without warning
- Inability to relax and feel safe
- Confusion
- Unsolicited thoughts that are not attached to present life
- Isolating from others: friends, family, coworkers, etc
- Guilt over the abuse, (should have and what if's) especially when children are involved
- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty making decisions even over the smallest things
- Emotionally shutting down and feeling detached
- Crying all of a sudden
- Crying frequently
- Having suicidal thoughts
- Not comprehending what one is reading even when read over and over again
- Depression
- Sleeping a lot
- No motivation and lack of interest in life, job, children, hobbies, etc.
- Feeling helpless and hopeless
- Dwelling on an event and having a hard time letting go
- Clinging to people and things
- Easily angered
- Uncomfortable in crowds
- Feelings of insecurity
- Difficulty in trusting others even if there has been a good relationship in the past
- Feeling like they are going crazy
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Out of control emotions
- Recollection of abusive incidences when no triggers are present
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Avoidance of feelings and thoughts that remind one of the abuse
- Always watchful and hyper alert
- Experience grief as related to the abuse
- Experience panic attacks
- Fearful of being out of the home/development of phobias
- Physical reactions: tension, heart palpitations, upset stomach, etc.

Being aware of PTSD is the first step in healing from the trauma of domestic violence. Drawing close to the Lord and putting Him first is crucial. Counseling is a helpful. A useful tool would be the book, *Healing the Trauma of Domestic Violence: A Workbook for Women* by Edward S. Kubany, Mari A. McCaig and Janet R. Laconsay.

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