



Peer Support Team Newsletter



Jack A. Digliani, PhD, EdD
Police Psychologist



Peer Support Teams are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week



Serve – Protect – Support – Surpass

October 2024 Volume 2 Issue 4

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Posttraumatic Stress, Posttraumatic Stress Injury, and Posttraumatic Growth

The stressor-related diagnosis *posttraumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) first appeared in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published in 1980 (DSM-III). Previous, and since discontinued, stressor-related diagnoses included *gross stress reaction* (DSM, 1952) and *transient situational disturbances* (DSM II, 1968). The diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder have changed several times since its inception. However, *stressor-exposure* has remained a constant. In DSM-III, the stressor exposure (criterion A) was defined as “Existence of a recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone” (238). Over the years, this has evolved into the current day “Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways.” Four ways are then specified (PTSD criterion A, DSM-5-TR). If criterion A is met and a person meets criteria B thru H, PTSD is diagnosed.

Is there a difference between PTSD and *posttraumatic stress* (PTS)? Yes, and it lies primarily in the PTSD diagnostic criterion G. Criterion G requires that to diagnose PTSD, the mental “disturbance” must cause “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.” This level of distress or impairment is not present in PTS. Instead, PTS is characterized by some elements of distress or impairment, but neither reach the threshold necessary to diagnosis PTSD. It’s a matter of degree. Unlike PTSD, PTS normally resolves within several weeks as the person psychologically processes the event. Social and specialized peer support can be especially helpful to a person experiencing PTS.

There has been some discussion about a formal name change for PTSD. Several organizations, including the U.S. military, have advocated that “disorder” be changed to “injury.” Advocates for this change argue that *posttraumatic stress injury* (PTSI) is more descriptive of the condition, better reflects the true nature of traumatization, reduces stigma associated with the term “disorder,” and makes it more likely that a person would seek treatment. Those opposed to the change argue that the word “injury” is too imprecise for a medical/psychiatric diagnosis. As it stands in October 2024, *posttraumatic stress disorder* remains the formal diagnosis. Time will tell if the PTSI advocates win out.

Is there a positive side to traumatic exposure? Consider this communication received from a UK police officer that had to utilize deadly force to protect a person from her abductor, “...I am also aware how having come through both the incident and the aftermath, that I changed in a positive way too. I believe that dealing with the incident made me more resilient, able to cope better with problems and difficulties (based on a mind-set that goes something like “If I can deal with all of that, I can deal with anything that life throws at me”). The incident also reinforced my personal levels of professionalism (and my expectations of it in others). Over time these positives have, I believe, come to the fore, whilst the negative reactions have faded.” This and similar experiences have been described as *posttraumatic growth* (PTG). PTG is defined as “the positive psychological change that some individuals experience after a life crisis or traumatic event. Posttraumatic growth doesn’t deny deep distress, but rather posits that adversity can unintentionally yield changes in understanding oneself, others, and the world. Posttraumatic growth can, in fact, co-exist with PTSD” (psychologytoday.com).

We should consistently remind ourselves that at least some positive outcomes can result from not-so-positive experiences. We do not have to focus on the undesirable or challenging responses which are sometimes generated out of unpleasant or unwanted experiences. We have an ability to examine the other side. We have an ability to achieve a better mental balance. To the degree this can be accomplished, we can move forward, through the physical, emotional, and psychological aftermath of any critical exposure. In this way we become survivors, challenged but stronger and smarter...JAD

Fight Right: Julie and John Gottman

Myth #1: Once we find a solution to the big fight we're having right now, we'll be all set—no more fighting! Not true. Most conflicts are perpetual, and it takes changing our approach to conflict at a fundamental level instead of focusing on solving one fight.

Myth #2: If conflict exists in our relationship, we're not supposed to be together. Nope, life isn't a fairytale! Every couple has conflict, and it's totally normal.

Myth #3: A conflict is a problem to be solved. Most conflict (about 2/3 of it!) doesn't have a solution, and instead we should focus on managing conflict instead of resolving it.

Myth #4: One of us is right, and one of us is wrong. Both partner's experiences and points of view are valid. Both realities are true. How we react, feel, and treat our partner is more important than who is "right".

Myth #5: Men are more logical than women, women are more emotional than men. The reality: logic and emotion do not have genders. Everyone has emotion & a need to be understood.

Myth #6: The best conflict management is logical, rational, and unemotional. Emotions and logic are actually intertwined. The best conflict management allows us to understand each other better, through listening to feelings and ideas.

Myth #7: Negative emotions are bad and should be avoided. There is nothing wrong with anger. What matters is how it is expressed.

Myth #8: Nobody can hurt you unless you let them. The idea that you "choose" to be hurt is just not how humans work. We can and do hurt each other. The difference is how you process this hurt and repair it together.

Myth #9: You have to love yourself before you can love somebody else. The truth is we all have vulnerabilities that may not heal, and that's okay. We can still have loving, fulfilling relationships. Our job is to care for each other and love our partners even when they can't love themselves.

Myth #10: To be "allowed" to have needs, we have to justify or explain them. Newsflash: "need" is not a dirty word. We are built to have needs, but it's our job to communicate them. One of the big reason conflicts arise is because we don't ask for what we need. Your partner cannot read your mind! (www.gottman.com)

Stress and Resiliency

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences. Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience.

Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family.



On the Science Scene The Atmosphere: Five Primary Layers

The earth's atmosphere is divided into five primary layers. Currently, you are breathing the *troposphere*, the layer closest to the surface of the earth. It is composed of approximately 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, and 1% argon, other trace gasses, and water vapor. It ranges from 5 to 11 miles thick. The troposphere makes up about 80% of the mass of the atmosphere and contains over 99% of its water vapor. Consequently, most weather phenomenon occurs within it. The layer above the troposphere is the *stratosphere*. The stratosphere contains the earth's ozone layer. The ozone layer protects the earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation emanating from the sun. Most large commercial aircraft fly within the lower stratosphere. Above the stratosphere is the *mesosphere*. Most meteors burn up in the mesosphere. Above the mesosphere is the *thermosphere*. The International Space Station orbits earth within the thermosphere. The outermost layer of the earth's atmosphere is the *exosphere*. The exosphere is comprised of mostly very sparse hydrogen and helium atoms. Beyond the exosphere lies interplanetary space. The layers of the atmosphere are characterized by differences in thickness, temperature, pressure, and density. Nearly 100% of the earth's atmosphere lies within 62 miles from its surface.

Help Prevent Police Officer Suicide

Learn more about the
"Make it Safe"
Police Officer Initiative
by visiting
www.jackdigliani.com

