

Recognizing and Understanding Trauma

Tips for Dealing with People with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

War, suffering, insecurities - refugees are confronted with all of these. They experience psychological suffering before, during and after their flight. It is not uncommon for refugees to suffer from traumas, having the potential of affecting the lives of many of them for a very long time. In some cases the traumatic experiences of fleeing lead to a so-called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in some refugees.

Recognizing and understanding trauma

What exactly is PTSD?

PTSD represents a possible **subsequent reaction** to one or more traumatic events. A **traumatic event** is a situation of extraordinary threat or catastrophic magnitude that would cause deep distress in almost anyone. Examples are the experience of physical and sexual violence, kidnapping, hostage taking, war, political imprisonment, torture, natural or man-made disasters, accidents, or the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness.

How PTSD manifests itself?

Situations or persons that remind of the trauma are experienced by the affected person as **extremely stressful** and cause **strong physical and emotional reactions**. Thus, attempts are made to avoid memories of these specific situations by not talking about them, repressing memories of the experience, and avoiding people and places that might remind them of the trauma.

Symptoms of trauma manifest themselves on the one hand **physically**, in which affected persons suffer from a high degree of overexcitement (the so-called hyperarousal), **nervousness, jumpiness and insomnia**. On the other hand, psychological symptoms appear, such as **emotional numbness, repetitive and unwanted thoughts** (so-called flashbacks), **and nightmares**. Avoidance behavior of places or persons that remind affected persons of the trauma is also particularly characteristic.

The symptoms of PTSD can occur immediately or with a delay after the traumatic event.

Recognizing trauma

To recognize trauma, be sure to look for the typical symptoms. These are summarized again here:

Typical symptoms of PTSD (so-called symptom triad)

Vegetative overexcitation

Excessive alertness, irritability, jumpiness. Sleep disturbances and concentration problems.

Avoidance behavior

Affected individuals try to strictly avoid situations, activities, places, and people that might evoke memories of the trauma.

Reliving the trauma

repeated, intrusive memories of the traumatic event (intrusion), flashbacks (triggered by key stimuli), nightmares.



Rapid interventions to help people with trauma or PTSD

The problem

People with acute traumatic experiences need **professional care as quickly as possible** to work through the traumas they have suffered. Unfortunately, in reality, it is difficult to seek professional help immediately. However, since it is precisely **the first period of traumatization that counts**, here are some **helpful interventions** to provide first aid.

What you can do

In contact with people with traumatic experience or PTSD, you should always make sure to **show understanding**. For people who have fled, this experience is a drastic life event, which is associated with extreme uncertainty. They therefore need someone they can rely on. Try to **be understanding and listen attentively**, but without going into too much detail about the traumatic events. Do not ask too detailed questions regarding the trauma and **gently change the subject**.

Helpful tips summarized



Internal and external securities

The primary goal after a traumatization is to regain a sense of security. With your assistance, you represent an essential part of this process!

Calming, stability

A significant contribution to regaining stability can be, for example, the conscious establishment of a regular, ritualized daily rhythm. Physical activity (without overexerting oneself) is recommended.

Talk about the trauma

After an acute traumatization, it is important and healing to be able to talk about what has been experienced. Here, however, it is advisable to seek conversations in a protected setting under professional guidance.

Treatment of trauma and PTSD - Who helps?

Finally, some good news

Trauma and PTSD can be treated well, and the **chances of successful treatment are high**. However, **intensive therapy** is needed to achieve a cure. **Cognitive behavioral therapy** approaches have proven to be particularly successful, with psychologists working with sufferers to break through repetitive thought patterns

and process the trauma. To address the body-related symptoms of a trauma, **breathing techniques** and so-called **neurofeedback** are recommended, in which affected persons learn to control their body processes such as breathing and heartbeat and thus calm down. In any case, a doctor or psychiatrist should be consulted, as medication may be appropriate.

Psychological (online) counseling for trauma and PTSD

Dealing with traumatized people can be very stressful for you. That's why **psychological counseling** is a good way to do something good for your **mental health**. For example, you can work with your psychologist on strategies for dealing with traumatized

people and **learn interventions** to help those affected. In the same way, you can strengthen your **resilience**, i.e. your **psychological resistance**, so that you can learn to deal with crises better in the future and emerge from them stronger.

Psychological counseling online at Instahelp

The **Versicherungskammer Group** with its approximately 7000 employees is **deeply affected by the warlike events in Ukraine**.

They show in a painful way that basic democratic rights and sovereign coexistence cannot be taken for granted, that even peace throughout Europe is in danger. Our thoughts are with the victims and the countless people who are suffering as a result of the current conflict in Eastern Europe.

The current time presents us all with a great mental challenge. That is why we are **encouraging helpers who have taken in refugees with an online psychological service** in cooperation with **Instahelp**.

You can find more information about the commitment of the Versicherungskammer Group here: <https://www.vkb.de/content/services/ukraine/>

