

LIVING WITH SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

PTSD Facts & Establishing Boundaries and Guidelines to Minimize Retraumatization

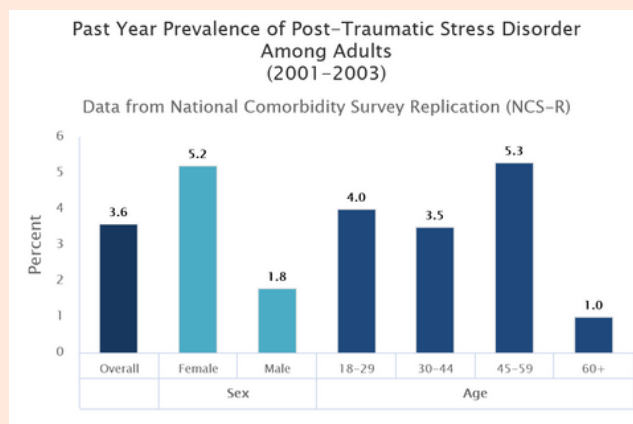
A Word About PTSD

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Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after exposure to a potentially traumatic event that is beyond a typical stressor. Events that may lead to PTSD include, but are not limited to, violent personal assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents, combat, and other forms of violence. Exposure to events like these is common. About one-half of all U.S. adults will experience at least one traumatic event in their lives, but most do not develop PTSD. People who experience PTSD may have persistent, frightening thoughts and memories of the event(s), experience sleep problems, feel detached or numb, or may be easily startled. In severe forms, PTSD can significantly impair a person's ability to function at work, at home, and socially.

Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Adults

- Based on diagnostic interview data from National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R), Figure 1 shows past year prevalence of PTSD among U.S. adults aged 18 or older.¹
 - An estimated 3.6% of U.S. adults had PTSD in the past year.
 - Past year prevalence of PTSD among adults was higher for females (5.2%) than for males (1.8%).
- The lifetime prevalence of PTSD was 6.8%.²



What is Retraumatization?

Retraumatization is to re-experience the ordeal in the form of flashback episodes, memories, nightmares, or frightening thoughts, especially by something that reminds you of the trauma. It over activates these parts of the brain and impedes the healing process, worsening the trauma in the process.

How to Avoid Retraumatization.

Respect your (and others) emotional boundaries surrounding the trauma.



Boundaries and Guidelines

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- Set boundaries with a "closed-door" or closed-curtain policy regarding:
 - a. Use of the bathroom—one at a time,
 - b. Keep the bedroom a safe place and maintain its sanctity.
- Establish a rule of being fully clothed when not in the bedroom or bathroom, for all family members,
- .One bed per person...no sleeping together.
- Make sure all children receive a thorough sex education appropriate for their age.
- Explain that any behavior which needs to be kept a secret is probably not good for children and that if anyone asks them to keep any behavior a secret, they should immediately tell you.
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- Make yourselves available to listen! The healing power of talking openly about one's thoughts and feelings to a trusted adult who merely listens cannot be overestimated.
- Don't pressure a child to tell you in detail what happened to him/her. Let the child be in control of his/her own capacity and willingness to disclose.
- Let the child be in charge of how much physical affection with you he/she wants, If he/she is hesitant about hugs. Hugging may be experienced as a threat to the child if it is initiated by an adult.
- Don't be shocked or Judgmental by what the child may say about the molest, Your reaction is very important, and a caring, non-judgmental attitude will be essential.
- Don't label the perpetrator as "sick" or "bad;" children may see themselves as also "bad" for having participated in the molest. Instead, you may want to say the perpetrator "broke the rules;" "has some personal problems to work on so he/she won't ever take advantage of a child again," etc.
- Keep sexually explicit material out of your home (e.g., explicit magazines, movies, etc.). And NEVER discuss your sex life or marital problems, or intimate aspects of your relationships with a child.

Explain different kinds of touch...be specific...and establish firm rules regarding what kinds of touch are not allowed in your home:

If a touch that is not allowed occurs, direct all children to come to tell you immediately and add that your interest is in protection, not punishment.

