

Fleeting Thoughts and Subtle Images

Have something in your mind that just won't go away? Does the thought continue to take up space in your mind? Do you have visions of an experience that you wish would disappear? People that experience or have been exposed to a traumatic event in which their lives were threatened or their integrity or the life or integrity of someone close to them sometimes have difficulty forgetting and or dismissing the distressing thoughts or images. Their response may have involved helplessness, extreme fear or horror. Events at your place of employment such as fire, police, military employment can trigger emotions that left untreated can trigger post traumatic stress disorder.

Symptoms of PTSD include distressing recurrent images, thoughts or perceptions, recurring dreams, feeling or acting as if the event were happening again, reacting to exposure to a reminder of the event, physical responses such as sweating, heart racing or trembling to a reminder of the event. Other symptoms include avoiding anything associated with the trauma, avoiding such things as feelings, conversations or thoughts that remind you of the trauma, isolating yourself to avoid people or places that remind you of the event. Difficulty recalling an important aspect of the event is also a symptom of PTSD. Loss of interest in activities and a sense of a foreshortened future are characteristics of this diagnosis. Inability to feel emotions and express those emotions and well as feeling detached from others may also happen.

The person with PTSD may also have difficulty with a normal sleep pattern and have trouble concentrating. They may seem more irritable and express anger more often than the average person who has not been traumatized. They adopt a feeling of hypervigilance watching their back and scanning their environment for signs of perceived danger. They may be overly startled if you walk up behind them and they do not know you are there.

People who have experienced more than one traumatic event may have complex PTSD in which the cumulative trauma is experienced with similar characteristics but with more intensity. Others may have Acute Stress Disorder which is experiencing a stressful event but resolving the symptoms with treatment.

Treatment includes management of stress including practicing diaphragmatic breathing, progressive relaxation, visual imagery and mindfulness meditation. Medications may be prescribed to help the neurotransmitters in the brain function with much more effectiveness. Exercise and reduction of stressful events is also recommended. People with PTSD appear to be depressed and anxious. Many of the symptoms of PTSD overlap with anxiety and depression symptoms. If treated, the person is able to lead a normal life. However, if left untreated, the stress response may cause certain regions of the brain to change overtime, causing cognitive deficits in attention, concentration, and short term memory.

For more information about PTSD you may contact Dr. Bev Matthews at Central Illinois Neuropsychological Services at 217-876-7929 or 217-825-9010.