

## DELAYED STRESS REACTION

The major responses seen among veterans suffering Delayed Stress Reaction to their experiences during and after the war are listed below. Most veterans show only a few of these responses. It should be remembered the Delayed Stress Reaction (also called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) among veterans is not a mental illness; it is a reaction to the extreme stress veterans were placed under during and after the war in which they served. Major responses are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Depression</li> <li>➤ Anger</li> <li>➤ Sleep Disturbances</li> <li>➤ Tendency to react under stress with survival tactics</li> <li>➤ Psychic or emotional numbing</li> <li>➤ Emotional constriction</li> <li>➤ Loss of interest in work and activities</li> <li>➤ Survivor guilt</li> <li>➤ Hyper-alertness</li> <li>➤ Avoidance of activities that arouse memories of traumas in war zone</li> <li>➤ Suicidal feelings and thoughts</li> <li>➤ Flashbacks</li> <li>➤ Fantasies of retaliation and destruction</li> <li>➤ Cynicism and distrust of government and authority</li> <li>➤ Alienation</li> <li>➤ Concern with humanistic values overlaid by hedonism</li> <li>➤ Negative self-image</li> <li>➤ Memory impairment</li> <li>➤ Hyper-sensitivity to justice</li> <li>➤ Problems with intimate relationships</li> <li>➤ Difficulty with authority figures</li> <li>➤ Emotional distance from children, spouse and others</li> <li>➤ Self-deceiving and self-punishing patterns of behavior such as an inability to talk about war experiences</li> <li>➤ Fear of losing others and a tendency to fits of rage</li> </ul> <p><i>Intrusive Thoughts and Flashbacks.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Replaying combat experiences; searching for alternate outcomes</li> <li>➤ Triggered by everyday experiences; smells (urine, diesel fuel), sounds (popcorn popping, five o'clock cannon), sights (dead animals along side the road)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Isolation.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Has few friends</li> <li>➤ Isolates families emotionally, some geographically</li> <li>➤ Fantasies about being hermits, moving away from their problems</li> <li>➤ Believes no one can understand, and no one would listen if they tried to talk about their experiences</li> <li>➤ Isolates self from their partners, family and others with a "leave me alone" attitude – needs no one</li> </ul> <p><i>Emotional Numbing.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Cold, aloof, uncaring, detached</li> <li>➤ Constant fear of "losing control," "I may never stop crying..."</li> <li>➤ Emotional distance from children; concern about anger</li> </ul> <p><i>Depression.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sense of helplessness, worthlessness, and dejection</li> <li>➤ Lacks self-esteem and suffers from great insecurity</li> <li>➤ Feels undeserving of good feelings</li> <li>➤ Seems unable to handle it when things are going well, and may appear to try to be sabotaging</li> </ul> <p><i>Substance Abuse.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Used primarily to numb the "pain," the memory, the guilt</li> <li>➤ Heavy use of either alcohol or drugs</li> </ul>	<p><i>Anger.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Quiet, masked rage which is frightening to the veteran and to those around them</li> <li>➤ Sublimating the rage against inanimate objects</li> <li>➤ Unable to handle or identify frustrations</li> <li>➤ Unexplainable, inappropriate anger</li> </ul> <p><i>Guilt – Suicidal Feelings and Thoughts.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-destructive behavior, hopeless physical fights, single car accidents, compulsive blood donors</li> <li>➤ Self-inflicted injuries to "feel pain" – man "accidents" with power tools</li> <li>➤ High suicide rates</li> <li>➤ Financial suicide, as soon as things are well off, doing something to lose it all, or walk away from it</li> <li>➤ Survivor's Guilt, when others have died around them ask "How is it I survived when others more worthy than I did not?" (Pertains especially to medical personnel)</li> </ul> <p><i>Anxiety or Nervousness.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Startled responses</li> <li>➤ Uncomfortable when people walk close behind them or behind them</li> <li>➤ Conditioned suspicion; trusts no one</li> </ul> <p><i>Emotional Constriction.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Unresponsive to self, therefore unresponsive to others</li> <li>➤ Unable to express or share feelings, cannot talk about personal emotions</li> <li>➤ Unable to achieve intimacy with family, partner or friends</li> </ul>
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## **THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA**

### **Behavioral**

- Hyper-vigilant
- Nightmares, night terrors
- Phobias
- Avoidance of reminders of traumas
- Regression
- Repetitive play
- Boundary difficulties

### **Cognitive**

- Intrusive memories
- Daydreaming; "Spacing out"
- Confusion
- Lack of organization, difficulty concentrating
- Hyper-vigilant

### **Emotional**

- Fearful
- Anxious
- Numb
- Depression
- Guilt
- Blame self or others
- Feel "different", alienated, detached from others

### **Physical**

- Stress related symptoms
- Stomach aches
- Wetting
- Increased psychological states of alarm

Compiled from the work of Lenore Terr, Jane Middleton-Moz and David Finkehor.

## **STRESS WARNING SIGNS**

An important step in dealing with harmful stress is to learn to identify those moments and situations which trigger the stress response patterns. It is best to be aware of the signs from your body, since mental and emotional events and signals that take place at one time is often confusing or difficult to pinpoint. Stress responses can occur even in events that are perceived as happy and pleasant. The following are the most often identified and most obvious indicators that stress is in action. Identify which are signs of stress for you.

- \* rapid pulse
- \* insomnia
- \* pounding heart
- \* dryness of throat and mouth
- \* shortness of breath
- \* feeling of unreality, weakness or dizziness
- \* tightened stomach
- \* emotional tension and alertness
- \* gritting teeth
- \* trembling, nervous tics
- \* biting lips
- \* high pitched, nervous laughter
- \* clenching jaw
- \* pain in neck or lower back
- \* migraine headaches
- \* inability to sit still, concentrate
- \* proneness to accidents
- \* increased smoking
- \* loss of appetite or compulsive eating
- \* general irritability, hyper-excitation or depression

## **COPING STRATEGIES**

- \* *TALK IT OUT*
- \* *GET ADEQUATE PHYSICAL EXERCISE*
- \* *EAT A PROPER DIET*
- \* *GET THE CORRECT AMOUNT OF SLEEP*
- \* *RESERVE ALONE TIME*
- \* *MEDITATE*
- \* *KEEP THE FAITH*
- \* *BE ASSERTIVE (NOT AGGRESSIVE)*
- \* *HELP SOMEONE ELSE*
- \* *USE FANTASY AS AN ESCAPE TECHNIQUE*
- \* *PRACTICE CONTROLLED BREATHING*
- \* *PRACTICE MUSCLE TENSING AND RELAXING*
- \* *MAINTAIN A SENSE OF HUMOR*

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