

WHAT IS PTSD:

PTSD is a natural response to an unnatural event. When you are experiencing a traumatic event your amygdala stops working and the brain cannot process events as it normally would; at this point information isn't stored as it usually would.

SYMPTOMS OF PTSD:

Avoidance: not wanting to see someone or do something. Not wanting to expose yourself because it reminds you of your experience. Avoidance gets bigger with time and can get to the point where it shuts down your life. The troubling part of this is that you never learn how to deal with those feelings making it so you never feel un-anxious.

Intrusion: Waves of emotion when you don't want to have them. This can include flashbacks where you become disoriented-this feels very real and present. Nightmares, night is especially difficult the more you avoid exposure the more it intrudes. Parents should find ways not to avoid so they become slightly desensitized.

Hyperarousal: with a quick switch to being easily startled, quicker to anger than what you used to be and in some cases even experiencing rage.

Rage: When you are experiencing rage, your adrenal system is out of whack. In the NICU your adrenalin never goes down, instead the adrenalin gets stored and your brain tells your body to create more, this can manifest as rage.

MORE ON THE ADRENAL SYSTEM:

Is there a way to stop your adrenal system from producing excess adrenalin?

You can work through therapy to desensitize yourself, practice relaxation techniques and even use a form of medication therapy wherein a benzodiazepine prescription such as Xanax can be used as a therapeutic drug. Using medications like this would be done under doctor's care. As a general outline of how that would work, one would take the medication regularly for 2 months in the morning and at night (instead of as a rescue medication). During this time the patient would practice relaxation and coping techniques learned from a therapist. After the 2 months' completion, there would be a weaning period. The end goal is to get the adrenal system closer to the patient's baseline and to establish a habit of practicing coping techniques. These coping mechanisms help when exposed to an anxiety trigger.

GRIEF AND TRAUMA:

Many times trauma gets intermingled with grief. There is no science behind the grief process. It's impossible to map out which phases you are going to enter next. There is a misconception that acceptance is the end point, the completion of grief. In reality, think of grief as a pie with acceptance in the center. At any time, you can be in grief and experience a trigger that pops you into sadness, anger, etc. One attribute that is common amongst the birth trauma demographic is Jealousy. Jealousy can be an added slice of that grief pie. When experiencing jealousy, it's helpful to be mindful that the degree to which you are jealous is the degree to which you are grief stricken.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

We tend to compare ourselves to the regular parent job description rather than the much more accurate preemie parent job description. The job you planned for is not necessarily the job you actually have, so be sure to give yourself credit for how you are doing.

WHAT CAN I DO NOW?

4x4x4 – Tactical Breathing

- Breathe in through the nose for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- Breathe out through the mouth for 4 seconds in a controlled release

This process changes the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in your system and helps your body to calm itself.

Hug Someone

This sounds silly but hugging someone where your torsos are in full contact can help to calm and relax. Doing this releases endorphins into your body much like holding your baby on your chest would. To get its effects make sure you are at the same level as the person you are hugging (grab a stool to accommodate if necessary) and make sure your torsos are in full contact. Women, hold this position for 60 seconds (1 minute). Men require 120 seconds (2 minutes) for these benefits.

FEELING OVERWHELMED AND NOT SURE WHAT TO DO?

Don't hesitate to seek out professional help. You are not alone in your feelings! Click [here](#) for a list of resources

Suicide Hotline for immediate assistance 1-800-273-8255