

an instant help book for teens

the
ptsd workbook
for teens

simple, effective skills
for **healing trauma**

* cope with
traumatic
memories

* create a
sense of
safety
and **calm**

* find **support**
and **connect**
with others

LIBBI PALMER, PsyD

“To date, resources specifically for traumatized teens have not been readily available, despite the fact that many experience traumatic events during childhood and into their teen years. This book, *The PTSD Workbook for Teens*, offers much-needed information aimed at the special needs of this population. Author Libbi Palmer addresses the main after-effects of trauma and offers practical information and worksheets to help teen readers work through their symptoms and reestablish safety, personal control, and positive self-esteem. I highly recommend it.”

—Christine A. Courtois, PhD, ABPP, psychologist and author of *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorder*, and *The Treatment of Complex Trauma*

“Palmer has provided teens with a terrific resource to understand, process, and heal from trauma. The book is quite comprehensive but easy to use, and gives teens the power to choose at what level they want to work through their issues. These are techniques that really work to help teens move on from bad experiences and feel better.”

—Carrie Merscham, PsyD, psychologist and author of the blog selfhelponthego.com

“Palmer has a powerful grasp on the needs of teenagers and a user-friendly approach to trauma recovery. This workbook provides hands-on tools, easily accessible by a teen working through trauma alone, or for treatment providers looking for a framework to help adolescent clients overcome trauma. Work through this book and find a road to peace.”

—Ambra Born, PsyD, Director of child psychological services at Reaching HOPE in Lakewood, CO

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To G. B. P., with love and gratitude for your unwavering support.

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a letter to teens

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *The PTSD Workbook for Teens: Simple, Effective Skills for Healing Trauma*. You may have picked up this book for a lot of different reasons. Maybe you recently experienced a traumatic event, or maybe it was something that happened a long time ago. More than one traumatic event may have happened to you. You may not even be sure that what happened to you was trauma. Maybe you are close to someone who has faced a trauma, and you want to know more about it. Someone may have suggested that this book would be helpful. Maybe more than one of these scenarios fits your situation. Whatever the case, this book is for you.

This book will help you understand what trauma is and how it often affects people. You will also learn skills that will help you manage the effects of the trauma. The initial activities in the book are aimed at helping you tell the story of your trauma in a way that makes it not hurt so much. The later activities in the book are focused on helping you move forward with the rest of your life now that you have addressed your trauma.

It may seem strange to you that in a book about healing from trauma, you aren't asked to talk in detail about your trauma until almost the end of the book. This is not by accident. It's important that you have the knowledge and skills in place to manage your reactions and to keep yourself safe before trying to process the trauma. So, skills come first. By the time you have the necessary skills, writing about the trauma in detail will be a relatively easy part of the healing process.

Each activity in this book will offer information for you to learn and at least one action for you to take. Some of the activities will be more important to you than others, but they build on each other, so it's best to go through the activities in order, at least the first time. You may find that you need to practice the skills from some activities more than others to get really good at them, and you may need to go back and review some activities later.

You may feel an urge to rush through this book just to "get it over with." That urge is completely understandable. Who wouldn't want to just be done with a trauma? I would like to encourage you to work through this book in a systematic way. Healing happens naturally if you are given enough time and support from the people around you. This book is designed to help you understand what is happening to you, to keep you relatively safe during the healing process, and to speed that process along as much as possible. Although the book will work with the natural healing that will take place anyway, if you rush through it too quickly, the effects of the trauma may not completely heal. Please take your time and work through each activity as thoroughly as you can. It will be best in the long run if you do.

You may decide to work through this book alone. The activities are designed to let you do that. Some people seek help from a professional, like a counselor, therapist, psychologist, social worker, or psychiatrist. This book may be something that you work on and share with that person. You may also decide to share the work you do in this book, or parts of it, with other people. Whom you share it with is completely up to you.

The overall concept for this book is based on the work of Dr. Judith L. Herman, a renowned psychiatrist, and *trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy*, which was developed by Dr. Judith L. Cohen, an innovative psychiatrist, and esteemed psychologists Anthony P. Mannarino and Esther

Deblinger. The skills this book teaches are primarily from cognitive therapy, which was developed by Dr. Aaron Beck. It's not important for you to remember those names, but you can be confident that this book is based on work that is well known to help people heal from the traumatic experiences they have faced.

Congratulations for taking this first step in healing from your trauma.

a letter to parents

Dear Parents,

If you have picked up this book, your teen has probably experienced some kind of traumatic event. This book is designed for teens who have undergone a variety of traumas: natural disasters, assault, abuse, deaths of loved ones, or any other event in the teen's life that seemed traumatic.

You may be wondering about the best way for you to support your teen. There are a few things that are important for you to know to help your teen through the healing process:

- When someone you love experiences a traumatic event, it's traumatizing for you too. Be sure to take care of yourself and get the support you need to help yourself through this difficult time. If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to help your teen.
- Trauma affects people in physical, emotional, and behavioral ways. You may notice changes in any or all of these areas in your teen. This is to be expected. This book can help your teen address each of these areas.
- Most people heal from most traumatic events with mere time and the support of the people who care about them. You and your teen may decide that additional support from a mental health professional is necessary. Assistance like this can help your teen learn skills to manage reactions to the trauma and heal faster. Professional help is especially important if your teen is engaging in risky behaviors like drug or alcohol use, or self-harm.
- Teens need as much normalcy as possible while they are trying to heal. This means that your teen should be allowed to do the same things as before, even if it makes you anxious to let her out of your sight. It also means that she needs the limits that you have always placed on her, so it's important that you continue to set and enforce rules for your teen.
- Support from people close to us helps us heal from trauma. It's important that you support your teen, but because teens normally have their closest relationships with friends, it's also important for your teen to spend time with his friends and others who support him.
- Teens need some privacy. It's important for your teen to share with you how she is doing and how you can support her. It may also be important that she have some privacy, so let her share with you as she chooses from this book, from her therapy, and from her experiences overall.

I want to reemphasize that most people heal from trauma without long-lasting effects. Your support and the tools in this book will make it even more likely that your teen will heal from her experiences.

1 sharing this book, or not

for you to know

Healing from trauma is a very personal process. You can choose how you use this book. One way of getting some feelings of safety back into your life is to decide where you will keep this book and with whom you will share it.

Because you may write some very personal details in this book, you may decide to keep it where no one will see it without your permission. You may choose to share parts of this book and some of the things you write. It's important that you get to choose what you share and when you share it. Maybe you are seeing a mental health professional, like a counselor, psychologist, or social worker. You might use this book in that work or decide to share it with that person.

Some of the traumas people experience are from nature, like earthquakes and tornadoes, but some traumas are caused by other people. Sometimes the person who has been traumatized wants to confront the person who caused the distress. If this is your situation, you may decide to share the book or parts of it later, but I recommend that you at least wait until you have finished working through the book. Then you can decide what you share.

Michael buys this book to help himself heal from being emotionally abused by his mother. He decides to keep the book in a locked drawer in his desk so that no one will be able to read it without his permission.

Jessica has been seeing a counselor since she was traumatized, and the counselor suggested that she buy this book. They are going to work on the exercises in the book together during their sessions.

Chris has been talking with his parents and his best friend about the trauma that he experienced, and he plans to share some of the activities from this book with them. Chris is going to keep the book on the top of his bookshelf to make sure that his younger siblings don't read it. He may decide to share parts of it with them when they are older, but until then, he wants to make sure they don't read it.

Answer the following questions about your particular situation:

Where are you going to keep this book to make sure it gets shared only with the people you want to share it with?

Whom do you know that you want to share this book or parts of it with?

Whom are you sure, at least for now, that you do not want to share this book with?

2 what is trauma?

for you to know

Trauma is an event that usually involves death or serious injury, or the threat of death or serious injury. The actual event doesn't have to happen to you directly; it can happen to someone close to you. Trauma is an event that is so frightening or painful that it overwhelms you and interferes with the ways that you usually cope with difficult events in your life. The event might have arisen from a natural disaster, like a hurricane, a tornado, or an earthquake. Or it might be something caused by things someone did, whether on purpose, like assault or abuse, or accidentally, like a car crash. for you to do

Everyone experiences events in different ways. How you respond during and after a trauma depends on many factors, including:

- How close you were to the event
- What the event was
- How much support you got from the people around you
- What else was happening in your life at the time
- What else happened in your life in the past

You may have picked up this book or been given the book in response to a particular event, but there may have been other traumatic events in your life. It's important to recognize all of the possible events in your life that might have been traumatic, even if you are sure you are over them. You can decide later if you need to do any further activities around the traumas that you think you have healed from.

Matt was recently bitten by a neighbor's dog and seriously injured. He had to have surgery and will always have some scars from the attack. His current reactions remind him of when he was frightened, confused, and angry after being chased by a dog as a young child.

Ashley is shocked and overwhelmed when she learns that her sister has been in a plane crash during her vacation. Even though Ashley is perfectly safe, she has trouble catching her breath, concentrating, and controlling her emotions.

for you to do

The following is a list of possible traumas. It's not a complete list, so there are lines at the end for you to add other events. Write an "X" in the first column for traumas that you have experienced. Then, for each event you have experienced, write an "X" in the column after that kind of trauma to tell whether you think it might still be affecting you.

I have experienced this kind of event.	Traumatic Event	This still affects me.	This does not still affect me.	I'm not sure if this still affects me.
	Dog bite			
	Car accident			
	Child abuse (physical)			
	Sexual abuse			
	Sexual assault			
	Physical assault			
	Significant injury			
	Robbery			
	Serious illness			
	Being threatened			
	Sudden death of a loved one			
	Domestic violence			
	Parents' divorce			
	Death of a pet			
	Natural disaster (tornado, earthquake, hurricane, and so on)			
	Other:			
	Other:			
	Other:			

...and more to do

Now look at the traumatic events that you marked in the previous chart.

What were things like right after those events happened?

What was it like after some time passed (a few months or more)?

What was helpful to you after those events?

What was not helpful to you after those events?

3 healing from trauma

for you to know

Unfortunately, trauma is something that many people experience during their lives. Many people heal from trauma with time and with their loved ones supporting them. Healing is a natural process that most people go through, but sometimes, extra help is needed to make the healing easier and this book may be that extra help you need. You may have experienced a trauma in the past that you have healed from, and you may have learned things from that healing that will help you heal from your current trauma.

One of the reasons it's important to heal from trauma is that you might experience trauma again in your life. If you heal from a trauma and then experience another trauma, you will have an easier time healing from the second trauma than you would if you had never experienced trauma before or had experienced a trauma before but not healed from it. You can look at this like getting a vaccination from your medical doctor. The doctor gives you a small dose of a virus in order to protect you from the virus in the future.

Sometimes people need help knowing how to heal. You will learn in upcoming chapters that one common response to trauma is to avoid reminders of the events, and another is to think about the trauma all the time, even when you don't want to. Without some guidance in knowing how to heal from trauma, some people think they should just keep talking about it and they will heal, while others think that if they just move on and try not to think or talk about it, everything will be fine. As you may have guessed, neither of these extreme ways of dealing with trauma is the best way to heal.

This book can help you find ways to heal from trauma, but healing takes time and effort on your part. You will need to learn and practice skills that will help you heal. It's important that you make a commitment to healing from the trauma you experienced. One of the activities ahead will help you weigh the pros and cons of going through the healing process right now. If you decide that this is not the right time, this book and other ways of healing will be available to you when you decide it's the right time.

Emily was sexually assaulted at a party. She commits to healing from her trauma and working through this book in order to get her life back to normal.

Josh was abused by his father when he visited him during a vacation. He has to go back to see his father in the next few weeks, so he plans to wait until after he returns some before doing anything more than learning the skills at the beginning of this book. He thinks these skills will help him, but he needs to wait until he is back at his mother's house before he processes the actual abusive events.

Sarah was in a bad car accident when she was in elementary school. She is using some of the things she remembers about healing from that accident to help her with her current trauma. For example, she remembers that for a while, she had trouble controlling her emotions and couldn't concentrate. Now when she is having trouble concentrating and is emotional, she can comfort herself and tell herself that the distressful experiences won't last forever.

for you to do

Healing from your current trauma may be easier if you can remember healing from a past trauma and what helped you.

What past traumas have you healed from? (For example, when you were a kid, you may have been in a car accident that doesn't bother you anymore.)

What are some things that helped you heal from those traumas that might help you heal from this trauma (for example, talking to your parents, spending time with friends, getting enough sleep)?

Sometimes it can seem that intentionally doing the work to heal from a trauma is too much trouble. This exercise is to help you weigh the advantages and disadvantages of healing from trauma at this time. Complete each of the columns by writing as many ideas as you can think of.



You probably wrote something in each of the columns, but now you can use all of the information you wrote down to figure out the best plan for you. Don't just choose the column that has the most ideas, but look at all that you have written and make the choice that's best for you. If you still aren't sure you are ready to heal from this trauma, it's okay to continue to work through some of the skills in this book. Then you can make your decision before the processing of the trauma starts.

My plan at this time is to:

Move ahead and process the trauma to heal completely as soon as possible. If this is your choice, move ahead to the next activity.

Move ahead through the skills and then decide about processing the trauma when the time comes. If this is your choice, move ahead to the next activity.

Wait to do anything. I'm not ready right now. If this is your choice, that's okay. This book will be here when you need it.

4 reacting to trauma: fight, flee, and freeze

for you to know

People react to frightening, dangerous, and traumatic situations differently than they react to other situations. Reactions to traumatic situations are always in three categories: fight, flee, or freeze. The responses happen automatically and are controlled by a primitive part of your brain. You don't get to choose which response you use.

Jacob is hurt in a car accident. When the paramedics arrive to help him, he tries to fight them and keep them away from him for the first few minutes after the crash. He later understands that they are there to help him, and he allows them to take him to the hospital. Once he gets to the hospital, he can't make sense of why he would fight with people who were trying to help him.

When she smells smoke and hears the fire alarm in her house, Samantha is so frightened that she runs out of the house and down the street. She doesn't even notice that she is running until she gets to the end of her street. She waits until after the fire department arrives before she moves closer to the house to find the rest of her family.

Nick was sexually abused by his soccer coach. When the coach first touched him inappropriately, Nick froze and was unable to move or talk. Now he feels bad for not fighting to keep the coach away from him and for not firmly saying, "No!" Since he didn't fight or say no, Nick is afraid to talk about what happened to him. He worries that people will think that he wanted the inappropriate touching to happen.

for you to do

How would you explain to Jacob that his reaction is normal and expected?

How would you explain to Samantha that her reaction makes sense even if she didn't realize at the time what she was doing?

What would you say to Nick to explain that you understand that he didn't want the touching to happen?

...and more to do

What reactions did you have when you were in a frightening, dangerous, or traumatic situation? Describe your reactions on the following lines and write the type of reaction (fight, flee, or freeze) before each reaction.

Reaction:

Reaction:

If you had additional reactions, you can note them here:

Can you now explain any of your reactions as fight, flee, or freeze reactions that you didn't understand when they were happening? If so, you can describe them here:

5 remembering trauma

for you to know

One of the reasons we react so strongly to trauma is that our brains are set up to store memories about trauma differently from memories about nontraumatic events. Trauma memories are stored as sense memories. You may remember sights, sounds, tastes, touches, smells, body sensations, or body positioning.

Although any sense can trigger a trauma memory or a strong reaction, smells are often especially tied to trauma memories. It's common for you to remember the smells that you smelled during the trauma. It would also be common for a similar smell to remind you of the trauma and make you think about it or react to it again.

The memories don't always have words with them, or you may find them difficult to describe with words. Also, these memories may not come in order from beginning to end.

Memories of trauma are often difficult to start and stop on purpose. You may find yourself thinking about the trauma without meaning to, and you might have trouble stopping the memory when you want to.

The purpose of working through the rest of this book is to process your traumatic memories and change them so that they are stored more like nontraumatic memories.

Amanda was in a store when it was robbed. During the robbery, a jar of pickles got broken, and now every time Amanda smells something like pickles, she gets very scared and has flashbacks of the robbery.

Drew is bullied at school and is often physically assaulted by some boys there. When he finally reports the assaults to the assistant principal, it's hard for Drew to remember what happened during each assault, and he feels as if he were viewing disconnected pictures of the assaults instead of a video.

for you to do

Think about a memory that was not traumatic, maybe your last birthday party. What do you notice about the memory? Do you remember events in order? Do you remember conversations or physical feelings more? Are there specific sense memories from that situation or not? Are you able to shift your thoughts to something else if you want to?

If you are comfortable doing so, think about what happens when you remember the trauma you experienced. What do you notice about that memory? Do you remember events in order? Do you remember conversations or physical feelings more? Are there specific sense memories from the situation or not? Are you able to shift your thoughts to something else if you want to? Is how you currently remember the traumatic event different from how you remembered it right after it happened?

What other differences do you notice between traumatic and nontraumatic memories?

6 thinking and remembering

for you to know

After you've experienced a trauma, it's common to keep thinking about what happened over and over again. Remembering like this can happen in different ways and is expected after a trauma.

Often the memories happen when you are awake, and they may distract you from what you are doing or from what people are saying to you. Sometimes the memories come when you are asleep, in the form of nightmares. Sometimes the memories are so strong that it feels as if you were back in the traumatic situation and the trauma were happening all over again. This scary kind of memory is sometimes called a *flashback*. Sometimes these memories cause reactions in your body, like tight muscles and a fast heartbeat, or intense feelings, like fear, anger, or sadness. Remembering the trauma may be distressing, but you will start to think about the trauma less and less over time and as you learn new skills to help you manage.

Brittany notices that she is having trouble concentrating at school ever since she was assaulted by her boyfriend. She finds herself thinking about her boyfriend and the assault. She's not doing well in her classes, and even little jobs around her house, like making her bed, are taking more time than usual. She is trying to keep in mind that this reaction is normal and will slowly go away now that the trauma has ended.

Dan has trouble breathing normally and feels really scared and angry when he drives past the park where he was jumped and robbed of his MP3 player. He passes the park every day and is really getting tired of his reactions.

Lizzie has been having nightmares since she witnessed a car accident that killed a classmate. She keeps waking up several times a night after having a nightmare in which she hears and sees the crash again. It takes her a long time to go back to sleep, and she sometimes doesn't even want to go back to sleep because she knows the nightmare will come back. She has learned to use skills to manage the nightmares and to get back to sleep faster when she does have them.

for you to do

Put check marks next to the ways that you have remembered your trauma, both right after the trauma and right now.

I did this right after the trauma.	I'm doing this now.	
		<i>I think about the trauma all the time.</i>
		<i>I think about the trauma when I am trying to think about other things.</i>
		<i>I'm having trouble concentrating on other things because I'm thinking about the trauma.</i>
		<i>I'm having nightmares about the trauma.</i>
		<i>I'm having other scary dreams, even if they don't seem to be about the trauma I experienced.</i>
		<i>I'm having flashbacks about what happened, in which I feel as if the trauma were happening again.</i>
		<i>I have physical reactions (like sweating, fast breathing, fast heartbeat, muscle tension, and so on) when I remember the trauma.</i>
		<i>I have intense feelings (sadness, anger, fear, and so on) when I remember the trauma.</i>
		<i>Other ways I've been reexperiencing the trauma:</i>

...and more to do

When have you noticed that you were thinking about or remembering the traumatic event that happened to you? Example: *I think about it more when other people ask about it or when my level of overall stress is worse.*

What makes your memories, flashbacks, or nightmares worse? Example: *Not getting enough sleep and spending too much time alone.*

What makes your memories, flashbacks, or nightmares better? Example: *Spending time talking to my friends, going to therapy, getting exercise.*

What ideas do you have that you think will help you manage your memories, flashbacks, nightmares? Example: *Taking a warm bath before going to bed.*

7 avoiding reminders

for you to know

Often, thoughts and memories after a trauma are uncomfortable and upsetting, so people frequently try not to think about the trauma. There are many ways you might try to avoid thinking about remembering the trauma.

Here are some of the ways you might avoid thinking about and remembering the trauma:

- You avoid conversations about the trauma and the people who might want to have those conversations with you.
- You sleep as much as possible to keep from thinking about the trauma.
- You even turn to alcohol or drugs to try to help yourself to avoid thinking about or feeling the trauma.
- You avoid people, places, or activities that remind you of the trauma.
- One extreme way to avoid thinking about or remembering the trauma is to be unable to remember important parts of the traumatic event. You may not be able to explain exactly what happened or the order the events happened in. The memories might come back, but they might not.
- You might stop being interested in or having fun doing activities that you used to enjoy.
- You might find yourself able to have only a limited number of feelings. For example, you may not be able to feel happy, and may only feel scared, sad, and angry.
- Finally, you may stop being able to see your future and may even start thinking that you won't have a normal future like everyone else.

Joey was assaulted on the way home from school. Ever since it happened, he has been having stomachaches in the mornings, so he stays home from school. He also avoids walking down the street where the assault occurred. When he has to go to school, he smokes marijuana after his last class, before walking home, so that he can relax and not have to think.

Taylor was sexually abused by her mom's boyfriend when she was in elementary school. She never talks to anyone about what happened. She has been asked several times if she was ever abused, but she continues to deny that she was abused because she can't think about it or talk about it with anyone.

for you to do

Put check marks next to the ways that you have avoided thinking about or remembering your trauma

both right after the trauma and right now.

I did this right after the trauma.	I'm doing this now.	
		<i>I try not to think about the trauma.</i>
		<i>I try not to feel any feelings about what happened.</i>
		<i>I try not to talk with anyone about what happened.</i>
		<i>I try not to do any of the activities that I was doing when my trauma happened.</i>
		<i>I try to stay away from the place where the trauma happened.</i>
		<i>I try to stay away from other places that I associate with the trauma (like the place where I was when I talked about the trauma for the first time).</i>
		<i>I try to stay away from people that were there when the trauma happened.</i>
		<i>I try to stay away from people who I know will want to talk to me about the trauma.</i>
		<i>I try to stay away from people who remind me about the trauma in some other way.</i>
		<i>I can't remember all of what happened to me when I was traumatized.</i>
		<i>I'm not interested in activities that I used to enjoy.</i>
		<i>I'm not interested in activities that I used to think were important.</i>
		<i>I don't feel connected to or attached to my family anymore.</i>
		<i>I don't feel connected to or attached to my friends anymore.</i>
		<i>I can't feel happy, excited, or other positive feelings anymore.</i>
		<i>I don't think I'm going to have a normal future like other people.</i>
		<i>I don't think I'm going to live as long as other people.</i>
		<i>I'm using alcohol or drugs to keep from thinking about or feeling the trauma I experienced.</i>
		<i>Other ways I have been avoiding memories of the trauma:</i>

...and more to do

What have you noticed about what you have been avoiding? Example: *I haven't talked to the person who used to be my best friend, because she was the first person I told about what happened and I don't want to talk about it anymore.*

Sometimes avoiding is okay, but sometimes you need to do things even when you don't want to. What are some things that you know you need to do even when you don't want to? Example: *I don't want to talk about what happened, but I have to testify in court and tell the truth.*

Who are some people in your life you can count on to help you get out and stop avoiding when you need to? Example: *Parents, friends, therapist, a couple of teachers.*

8 being jumpy and on edge

for you to know

After the trauma you experienced, you might have found yourself being more jumpy and on edge than usual. This can make it hard for you to sleep, cause you to jump at loud noises, and make you grouchy or irritable. You may also start seeing more danger in the world than you did before the trauma, and then spend time watching out for that danger.

Tyler witnessed a shooting. Now he notices that he jumps and becomes very anxious when he hears loud noises that remind him of the sound of a gunshot. He also notices that he always looks around him, even during class. Because of these reactions, he's falling behind in school since he can't keep his mind on his work.

Megan was sexually assaulted while on a date at a school dance. Ever since this event, she notices that she is having difficulty sleeping. Sometimes the sleep problems are because of nightmares, but other times she just can't fall asleep. Megan's parents notice that she yells at them and at her siblings, and also gets angry with her friends. As time goes on, Megan slowly becomes less irritable and angry, but she's still having trouble at school because she is very afraid of people coming up behind her. She tells one of her friends about her fear, and her friend agrees to stand behind Megan while she is at her locker. Megan is then able to get her things from her locker without fear, and she starts to feel better at school too.

for you to do

Put check marks next to the ways that you have been jumpy and on edge, both right after the trauma and now.

I did this right after the trauma.	I'm doing this now.	
		<i>I have trouble falling asleep.</i>
		<i>I have trouble staying asleep.</i>
		<i>I am irritable and easily annoyed.</i>
		<i>I get angry more easily than I used to.</i>
		<i>I have trouble focusing or concentrating on the things that need my attention, like schoolwork.</i>
		<i>I feel that I need to watch for danger around me all the time.</i>
		<i>I jump at loud noises.</i>
		<i>Other arousal symptoms:</i>

...and more to do

What helps you calm down when you are feeling jumpy and on edge? Example: *Going to a yoga class or calling my best friend.*

Do you have any ideas about what might help you with your arousal symptoms, such as how Megan asked her friend to watch her back when she was at her locker?

Are there people who can help you when you are having arousal symptoms?

9 do you have PTSD?

for you to know

You may have heard of PTSD and wondered what it was and if it applied to you. *PTSD* stands for *post-traumatic stress disorder* and is one of many mental health diagnoses that can be applied as a result of being exposed to trauma. To be diagnosed with PTSD or any of the other conditions that occur from being exposed to trauma, you must see a medical doctor or mental health professional, like a counselor, therapist, psychologist, or social worker.

PTSD is a collection of the reactions and symptoms we talked about in previous activities, like avoiding reminders of the trauma, having intrusive thoughts and nightmares, and being jumpy and on edge. For your reactions to qualify as PTSD, they must significantly interfere with your normal functioning for a time. PTSD is often used on television and other media sources to explain a person's reactions to trauma, when that's not always an accurate description. Depression, for example, is another mental health diagnosis that's common after exposure to trauma.

An important thing for you to remember about PTSD and any other diagnosis that you receive as a result of being exposed to a trauma is that these diagnoses are usually not permanent. While some mental health disorders are *chronic*, meaning that they can be treated but never go away completely, PTSD and other reactions to trauma usually go away completely. The difference is similar to having a physical injury, like a sprained ankle, compared to having a physical disability, like cerebral palsy. Both conditions may make it necessary for you to use crutches, but the sprained ankle will heal, while the disability is usually chronic.

Hannah was in her house when it was hit by a hurricane. She got out of her house okay physically, but is having a lot of thoughts and nightmares about the hurricane and feels irritable, jumpy, and angry all the time. She starts going to a therapy group at her school for students with PTSD. She asks the group leader, a school social worker, about PTSD. Hannah feels better knowing that so many people have had similar reactions to traumatic events that the reactions have a name (PTSD).

for you to do

Make a check mark next to all of the problems you are currently having because of the trauma you experienced.

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