



# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a set of reactions that people can develop following a traumatic event in which their safety or life, or that of those around them, was threatened. Examples of situations that can lead to PTSD include serious accidents; physical or sexual assault; war; or disasters, such as bushfires. Feelings of intense fear, helplessness or horror experienced during a traumatic event lead some, but not all, people to develop PTSD which may include some combination of the following indicators:

- Person may seem agitated, irritable or even angry
- Person may be visibly distressed (e.g., crying, shaking)
- Person may appear unusually still or disconnected from what is going on around them (i.e., dissociated)
- Person may report or be observed to have very low mood and appear very 'flat'
- Person may experience a 'reliving' or 'flashback' of the traumatic event which may be very distressing
- Person may report feeling unsafe or display behaviour that indicates they are feeling unsafe (e.g., being hypervigilant)
- Person may report sleep difficulties (e.g., insomnia, nightmares)
- Person may disclose suicidal thoughts or intention to harm themselves

## POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Post-traumatic growth is related to the positive changes that someone may experience following a traumatic event. Research suggests that post-traumatic growth can be experienced in three different life domains: people's relationship with others, their sense of self, and their life philosophy.

Indicators of positive changes in a person's world view following a traumatic event may include:

- Stronger relationships with others (e.g., family, others who have also experienced trauma).
- Increased ease of self-disclosure or desire to share their story; many people who experience trauma feel the need to talk about their experience.
- Increased desire to express thoughts and emotions, and ease in doing so (e.g., engaging in honest rather than superficial social responses)
- Increased empathy, compassion, and willingness to help others who have experienced trauma
- Increased sense of vulnerability and strength (i.e., having survived a life threatening or dangerous situation)
- Increased sense of self-competence, self-reliance and ability to cope
- A greater appreciation of everyday things (e.g., friends, family, music, nature)
- A shift in priorities (e.g., from work to family, from body image to healthy living)