

## A Guide to PTSD in Teens



While we most often associate [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) with veterans and active-duty members of the military, teens can develop PTSD. In fact, any teen who experiences trauma can develop PTSD. These traumatic events are characterized by a situation that could have caused the teen or someone else to be killed or hurt badly. PTSD-inducing events may include sexual or physical abuse, violent crimes, floods, school shootings, car accidents, fires, war, a loved one's suicide, or experiencing violence in their neighborhood. It is important to understand the risks of PTSD and how to treat PTSD if you are a loved one or caregiver of a teenager.

### PTSD and Children/Teens, By the Numbers

In the United States, studies show that approximately 15%-43% of girls and 14%-43% of boys experience at least one trauma. Of those [children and teens](#) who experience trauma, between 3%-15% of girls and 1%-6% of boys develop PTSD, though it is important to note that rates of PTSD are higher for certain trauma survivors, such as those who experience rape and assault. The chances that a child or teen will get PTSD depend on the severity of the trauma, how their parents react to the trauma, and how close the child is to the trauma. Of course, teens who experience the most severe trauma have the highest levels of PTSD symptoms.

### The Effects of PTSD on Teens

Because teens are older children but not yet adults, they can experience PTSD in ways similar to both children and adults. One of the most significant differences in the ways in which teens experience PTSD, however, is that they are more likely to show impulsive or aggressive behaviors due to the disorder than younger children or adults are. Typically, [teens](#) who have PTSD have issues with fear, worry, sadness, and anger. They often feel alone and isolated from others and have extreme difficulty with trusting other people. Teens who have PTSD also exhibit self-harm and engage in out-of-place sexual behavior. Teens with the disorder also commonly abuse alcohol and drugs.

### Substance Abuse in Teens with PTSD

PTSD is associated with intense anxiety, unwelcome memories, and flashbacks that interfere with a teens' daily life. That is why teens with PTSD often turn to [drugs or alcohol](#); they want to numb their pain or feel as though they have some control over their disorder and lives. The problem is that alcohol and drugs exacerbate the symptoms of PTSD. Alcohol worsens the depression and anxiety the teen feels and interferes with his sleep patterns. Teens with PTSD who abuse substances are much more likely to take risks, such as driving under the influence or engaging in a physical altercation with another person.

## **PTSD and the Risk of Suicide in Teens**

[Researchers](#) have been studying the link between PTSD in teens and the suicide rate of teens. [Suicide](#) ranks in the top three leading causes of death among teens 15-19 years of age, and one study shows that 10% of teens with PTSD attempted suicide. Because there is an increased risk of suicide attempts in teens with PTSD, it is important to note the warning signs of suicide in teens. They include talking about suicide, claiming to feel hopeless or worthless, experiencing a deepening depression, having a preoccupation with death, taking unnecessary risks, losing interest in friends or hobbies, giving away prized possessions.

Addicted teens with PTSD are even more likely to attempt suicide. In fact, these teens may use drugs or alcohol in their [suicide attempts](#). If you think that a teen who has PTSD is suicidal, you need to get help immediately. If the person is in immediate danger, call 911. If the person is not in immediate danger, [call](#) the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

## **PTSD Treatment for Teens**

There are several forms of [treatment](#) available for teens who have PTSD. These include cognitive behavioral therapy, psychological first aid, and play theory. If you think that a teenager is struggling with PTSD, it is important that you speak to his doctor and seek professional medical help right away. In some cases, the doctor may even recommend a [PTSD service dog](#) to help your teen. These dogs are specially trained to help those who suffer and live with PTSD by assisting during a medical crisis, providing treatment-related assistance, assisting in coping with emotional overload, and performing security enhancements tasks.

Teens who have PTSD need to receive professional help so they can deal with their issues and thrive despite their mental health challenges. It is critical for their loved ones to provide support and help, but it also is crucial for them to receive professional medical help as well.

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pertaining to medical inquiries and general health. When Jennifer is not busy being a student, she enjoys walking her dog through the park.

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