



What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

Traumatic experiences can happen to anyone, but for 20% of individuals exposed to traumas such as assaults, serious accidents and natural disasters, exposure to such an experience will result in them developing PTSD. This condition can develop months or even years after the trauma. If you have PTSD you are likely to be struggling with symptoms where you are re-experiencing your trauma often through nightmares and flashbacks. You may be avoiding situations which remind you of the event and experiencing hyperarousal where you feel that your body's alarm system is switched 'on' for much of the time. There are a number of factors which may influence whether you develop PTSD or not, including how controllable the traumatic event was thought to be at the time; whether you've had previous experiences of trauma, how supported you felt at the time of the trauma and the degree to which you may feel responsible, ashamed or guilty in response to the trauma.

Can treatment help?

The evidence-based psychological treatment for PTSD is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). It is a highly effective treatment, particularly for those young people who have not experienced any previous traumatic events and are not struggling with any other significant mental health problems. Most young people however, even those with previous traumas do benefit from CBT treatment for PTSD.

CBT Assessment and Key Treatment Strategies

As part of the assessment, Bristol CBT Clinic invites young people (and if helpful, their parents / carers) to complete some questionnaires that assess the severity of the PTSD, how it impacts on daily life, what thoughts and beliefs are associated with the problem, and an assessment of other difficulties. Following the assessment, sessions focus on the following:

- Developing a shared understanding of the PTSD and what is keeping it going
- Working together to agree goals for treatment
- Identifying ways to manage the symptoms and to reduce the negative effects of PTSD
- Support to process the trauma memories with the aim of remembering the events and consequences without having to re-experience or re-live the trauma.
- Developing helpful ways of thinking and behaving with the goal of reducing the experience of threat and feelings of guilt, shame and anger.
- Developing a plan of activities to re-engage with a full, satisfying life which is no longer limited by PTSD symptoms.