

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Marriage and PTSD: What is happening to us?



■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

*He heals the brokenhearted and
bandages their wounds.*

Psalm 147:3 NLT

Many different marital problems enter a counseling office. Some are common, like communication problems. Some have hidden causes which may evolve into complicated problems. PTSD is tough on marriage, and the spouses tend to be feeling desperate for some help.

What is PTSD?

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the result of extreme trauma, and the symptoms may be masquerading. There are four specific "cluster" areas that are affected by PTSD.

The DSM-5 criteria:

1. **Intrusion:** This can be when awake or in dreams, in thoughts, feelings, or physical reactions to anything that reminds you in any way of the trauma. A smell? A sound? The location?
2. **Avoidance:** Efforts are made, whether successful or not, to avoid any reminders, whether memories or actual people/things.

3. **Negative alterations in cognitions (thoughts/perceptions) and mood:** These symptoms vary, but it usually involves thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about oneself, the world, and/or God changing negatively and drastically. One of the changes important to marriage is feeling detached or "estranged" from others.

4. **Alterations in arousal and reactivity:** This can include irritability, recklessness, concentration, sleep problems, extreme watchfulness, and overreacting when startled. The "fight or flight" response comes too easily. One client described it as living in an unending panic attack.

PTSD and Marriage

A "normal" marriage has conflict without PTSD involved. Add in PTSD, and marital cycles are likely to devolve quickly. Consider these examples:

- *Bob has kept the childhood molestation a secret. Over the past few months, Bob has been going to bed later and later at night. Once in bed, he no longer*

cuddles with Amanda but instead lies on the edge of bed. If he falls asleep, he tosses and turns, but he usually only sleeps on the couch. There are no more hugs or kisses hello or goodbye, and Amanda is dumbfounded when Bob yells that she doesn't love him anymore. Bob always seems lost in thought and jumps at the slightest touch. He is getting more and more irritable, staying at work later, and spending more and more time alone when he finally comes home. Amanda is pretty sure that he is having an affair.

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Welcome | New Staff & Clinical Interns



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- Milly was in a bad car accident and has had difficulty riding in a car since that time. Milly vacillates between blaming the driver of the car that hit them, the driver of their vehicle, who just happens to be Milly's spouse, Tony, and then blames herself for not being awake to watch the oncoming traffic. When she did ride in the car, Milly became the worst backseat driver Tony had ever known. He understood her anxiety for a while, but it's been almost six months and it is getting worse. Milly is now refusing to even drive the car herself, jumping at the sound of brakes on their own street when safe inside their home. By now, Tony is just getting angry because Milly "refuses" to try to get over it.

PTSD can go unrecognized and undiagnosed for a long period of time. Once diagnosed, one can have an extremely difficult time understanding how a previously loving spouse can become "a completely different person."

Building a Game Plan

It bears repeating: PTSD is tough on marriage, and the spouses tend to be feeling desperate for some help. Here's s o m e a d v i c e .

For the one who experienced the trauma:

Therapy: Question: How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: Only 1, but the light bulb has to want to change. Because of the extreme need for avoidance, therapy can be difficult to even consider but is highly recommended. Some types of therapy available are: exposure therapy, EMDR, cognitive behavioral therapy, group therapy, and more. Be sure to research.

Medications: Some are available to help with the symptoms, although there is no cure presently available. There are psychiatrists who specialize in or are highly experienced with PTSD.

For both:

Support: The Bible uses the analogy of a body to describe the church, saying that He has different gifts and purposes for every one of us (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). Everyone needs support from the other parts of the body; it is even more important when you are hurting.

Couple's therapy: "A house is built by wisdom and becomes strong through good sense.... So don't go to war without wise guidance; victory depends on having many advisors." (Proverbs 24:3,6)

Forgiveness: Necessary for any marriage - and expected by God! (Matthew 6:14). Hurts will happen; more hurts will

happen because of the nature of the PTSD symptoms.

Deep-breathing exercises and more: This can help with stress management and lessen the impact of the "fight or flight" response for both. Many useful techniques can be found online or in books on managing emotions.

Physical safety: Consider this, if necessary, in deciding how to move forward.

Faith: Read scripture. Pray. Possibly attend a prayer ministry meeting. Don't forget to go to God: "the rock where no enemy can reach me" (Psalm 62:7). ■

"A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12 NLT



Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our Schererville, IN location.

Therapeutic Writing

■ by Kathy Konrath, MA, LCPC, LMHC

*O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long must you look the other way?
How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?*

David, Psalm 13



Have you ever felt this way? Forgotten by God? Disregarded? Anguished? In despair? I have. And I am so grateful that King David put his words down for me to read. One of the most remarkable things about David's words as written throughout the Psalms is that he often finds his resolve through writing. As you continue reading Psalm 13, you see David pour out his anguish which leads to anger, then desperation, and finally a resolve to trust in God. I can almost sense David taking a deep breath before he pens the words of verse 5, "But I trust in your unfailing love."

David found his resolve.

The process of writing has the potential to bring you through your feelings, and that's really what you want to do – move *through* your

feelings. Feelings have a way of moving us, and when left unchecked, feelings can mingle with thoughts and orchestrate us to say or do things we don't really mean. I believe the pastime of writing can help you get in touch with your feelings, identify your thoughts and ultimately find a resolve. David was a man of God. Even as he sinned and made major mistakes, he was devoted to the Lord. Through his writing he was able to get in touch with his feelings and the messages in his mind (such as "God has forgotten me") and settle upon a truth that is deeper than any thought or feeling – God's unfailing love for him.

You and I can tap into that resolve by taking time to express ourselves through written words. The act of putting pen to paper engages the left side of the brain which exercises logic and organizational thought, while the right side of the brain is free to create, intuit and feel. Writing opens the window to let you see what's inside yourself (thoughts and feelings) and express what you find in a safe and contained manner (it's just you, God, the pen and paper).

As you write, you work to remove mental blocks that can hinder you from getting clarity on what's really going on. With greater clarity, you may be able to determine what you really want or need in the moment (something that can be challenging when feelings scream back, urging to find immediate relief).

Do not agonize over the process of writing. You don't have to be a "writer" or have experience with journaling in order to experience the healing benefit - just a willingness to engage the process of writing to see where it leads.

P.S. It is not always necessary to share your writing with another person (although that in and of itself can be quite healing). Re-reading what you have written can be enough to let yourself "hear" what's really going on in your heart, mind and soul. When you have entered that place, and your heart can speak, you might find you are ready to listen. The Holy Spirit is always listening.

Get Started: Buy a notebook. Grab a pen. Take a deep breath and begin.

Ideas to Help Your Writing Get Underway

1. Write by topic: anger, fear, joy, peace, guilt, etc. Write about times you have felt that way: Why did you feel that way? What was going on just prior to/at the time the emotion emerged? What did you do in response to the feeling? What did others do? What helped? What didn't? Discover what you learn about your experience with that particular emotion and see if there is a pattern.
2. Write a letter to yourself, from yourself. What do you want to tell yourself right now? If you were your own best friend, what would you say to yourself? ("Dear Kathy ...").
3. Write a "Do Not Send" letter to anyone with whom you have unresolved issues with (your spouse, child, boss, deceased parent, etc.). Write the letter without any hindrances. Say what you want to say but have not been able to. When you are done, shred the letter or resolve to talk about it when the time is right (but **do not send** the Do Not Send letter!).

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4. Write a letter to your future self. Where do you want to be 5 years from now? What hopes and dreams do you have for yourself? Take a moment and tell yourself these things in a letter. After writing the letter, seal it in an envelope, address it to yourself, put a stamp on it and give it to a trusted family member or friend with instructions to drop it in the mail 1 year from the date written.
5. Write a letter to your child self. (This may best be done with your counselor.) Imagine yourself as a child growing up. What do you want to say to this child? If this becomes painful, process it with a trusted friend or your counselor.
6. Write a talking and feeling boundary. Complete this sentence when you have a strong emotion you need to work through:
 - “When you...” (details about what happened/what was said or done)
 - “What I thought was ...” or “What my mind made up about that was” (thoughts and beliefs)
 - “and about that I feel ...” (Anger, Pain, Fear, Shame, Guilt, Love, etc.).
7. Write a gratitude list. For the next 30 days, list 5 things you are grateful for. Do not repeat any items on your list for the next 30 days!
8. Write your highs and lows for the day. What was the best part of your day? What was the worst? ■

We'll share more about Therapeutic Writing in October on our Facebook Page. We'd love to hear how writing has helped you!



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