

## **Working With Patients: Assessment**

**The key to an informative assessment is an effective health interview. First, always ask patients, “Have you ever served?”**

Anyone can be a veteran. Furthermore, in addition to PTSD, there are many medical concerns unique to military members. Unfortunately, up to 56% of community providers don't routinely ask patients if they have served.

With health care for veterans increasingly being provided outside of the VA system, immediately identifying a patient as a veteran is critical to providing quality care.

Have You Ever Served is part of a national campaign being backed by the American Nursing Association, First Lady Michelle Obama, and Dr. Jill Biden. It's called the Joining Forces campaign.

**If you suspect a patient may have PTSD, you may want to compare their behavior to a standard screening aid.**

There are various tools available to aid in assessing PTSD. Validated screening tools are available for use with patients based on your time and assessment needs. The Primary Care PTSD Screen (PC-PTSD) and PTSD Checklist (PCL-M) are two instruments commonly used for the assessment of PTSD, especially among veterans.

For more comprehensive tools and instruments download our PTSD Measures pdf or one of the electronic tools provided by the US Department of Veteran Affairs.

## **PTSD symptoms break into 3 different categories.**

**Re-experiencing Symptoms** : Reliving the traumatic event.

*Description*

Re-experiencing symptoms are symptoms that involve reliving the traumatic event. There are a number of ways in which people may relive a trauma. They may have upsetting memories of the traumatic event. These memories can come back when they are not expecting them.

*Examples*

- Disturbing Dreams
- Flashbacks
- Intense reaction to a car backfire or news report

**Avoidance & Numbing Symptoms** : Attempting to avoid or dull the memory of the event  
*Description*

Avoidance symptoms are efforts people make to avoid the traumatic event. Individuals with PTSD may try to avoid situations that trigger memories of the traumatic event. Numbing symptoms are another way to avoid the traumatic event. Individuals with PTSD may find it difficult to be in touch with their feelings or express emotions towards other people. For example, they may feel emotionally "numb" and may isolate from others.

*Examples*

- Avoids going near places where the trauma occurred
- Avoids other sights, sounds, smells, or people that are reminders of the traumatic event
- Feelings of emotional isolation from others
- Decreased interests in activities formerly enjoyed

**Hyperarousal Symptoms** : A constant feeling of being "on guard."

*Description*

People with PTSD may feel constantly alert after the traumatic event. They may find that they are constantly "on guard" and on the lookout for signs of danger. They may also find that they get startled easily.

*Examples*

- Difficulty sleeping
- Outbursts of anger or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating

**By looking out for symptoms within these clusters, you can help identify if your patient needs further help.**

[www.nurseptsdtoolkit.org](http://www.nurseptsdtoolkit.org)  
American Nurses Foundation Resource