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# FAQs about PTSD Assessment

## How can I tell if I have PTSD?

Many people ask us how they can decide for themselves whether they have PTSD. It is natural to want to know why you are feeling or acting a certain way. However, figuring out on your own whether or not you have PTSD is difficult. Even skilled professionals can find it hard to know which tool to use when trying to assess whether a patient has PTSD.

Providers who have been trained to understand the thoughts and behaviors that go along with PTSD are best able to make that decision. A provider must use his or her training and judgment to select the best test or set of questions to use. Then he or she must interpret the results of the test.

The American Psychological Association suggests that only trained professionals give tests to assess for PTSD. If you think you may have PTSD, talk to your doctor or a mental health provider. See related readings for how to find a therapist.

## How can I find out if a mental health provider is able to evaluate me for PTSD?

You can ask questions about the provider's training and experience. Here are some questions you might ask:

### ***"What is your specialty area?"***

It is common and proper for a provider to specialize in working with certain kinds of trauma survivors. For example, a provider may work with adult survivors of recent traumas. Be aware, though, that a given provider's specialty area may not apply to you. He or she may not have knowledge or experience of trauma survivors like you. Also you may find a provider that does not specialize at all. Such a provider may offer to assess and treat any type of trauma, in either children or adults. He or she may not have enough expertise to do a good job on your assessment.

### ***"How many trauma assessments have you done?"***

Experience with at least 10 assessments is preferred.

### ***"What formal training have you had that will allow you to evaluate me for PTSD?"***

If possible, find a professional who has had training focused on PTSD assessment. Such providers are preferred over those trained only in general assessment.

### ***"Are you a member of any professional groups related to traumatic stress?"***

You may want to look at the web site of any group the provider mentions. This could give you an idea of how that provider works with patients who have PTSD. Ask yourself if the activities of the group seem proper and important.

### ***"Can you tell me a little about how you assess PTSD?"***

You should feel comfortable with the assessment methods that a provider will use. A good assessment of PTSD can be done without the use of any special equipment. Most often, providers will have you fill out sets of questions or they will use a standard interview.

## **Who can request a PTSD or trauma measure from the National Center for PTSD?**

The American Psychological Association requires advanced training of anyone who gives and interprets psychological tests. That is why we only give out measures to people with training. Advanced training is at least a master's degree in a related clinical area. Graduate students must have a professor get the measure for them. Students must be supervised by the professor while they use the measure.

## **What is the difference between an evaluation that measures trauma exposure and an evaluation that measures PTSD?**

A measure of trauma exposure looks at whether you've gone through a traumatic event. Examples of traumatic events include combat, a car accident, or child sexual abuse. Sometimes the evaluation asks when the event happened. For example, you might be asked your age at the time of the experience. A measure of trauma exposure may also assess how much the experience affected you. You might be asked if you felt your life was in danger.

By contrast, a measure of PTSD looks at how you felt or acted after you went through the traumatic event. Some evaluations also ask about other problems such as depression or relationship problems. These other problems do not lead to a PTSD diagnosis, however.

## **I am trying to prove that I have PTSD. Can I use one of these measures to help me do this?**

Only the results of a complete evaluation given by a professional can be used as evidence of PTSD. Any organization with which you might be dealing will need this. Therefore, you should see a health care provider who has experience in this area.

If you are a veteran, go to <http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets/> for fact sheets on how to submit a compensation claim for PTSD. You can also call your local VA Medical Center to ask about benefits. Veterans Service Organizations (VSO's) also offer free guidance on completing claims.