



- ◆ **Encourage professional help.** PTSD is best treated by professional. Navigating the mental terrain of a person with PTSD can be a complicated and difficult process. Even if you think you know what's best, stay in the friend zone and out of the treatment zone. You may want to have a few names of therapists or counselors handy to suggest. Stay in the role of supportive friend.

PTSD

Helping Your Friends

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“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

—Fred Rogers

- ◆ **Listen.** Listening is the most important thing you can do. Your friend may want to talk about the trauma or just about the feelings. Be patient and prepared to hear unpleasant things. Don’t be surprised by strong reactions, like anger and tears, to the memories. Try not to interrupt to make points of your own. The simple act of listening can be a lifeline.
- ◆ **Don’t pretend.** If a friend is mourning the death of a loved one, and you’ve experience this loss, you can say *I understand*. But if your friend was in a war, and you weren’t, saying *I understand* or *I know how you feel* is a turnoff. It may even be upsetting. In these situations, you can honestly say I can’t imagine how much that must hurt or What you went through sounds terrible. The point is to let your friend know you want to connect in a genuine way.

- ◆ **Be patient.** You may hear the same stories over and over again. No matter what you are talking about, your friend may circle back to talk about the trauma in some way. S/he may say strange or shocking things that don't make much sense to you or insist there isn't a problem, when you can see that there is. It's easy to get fed up. Try to keep in mind that your friend needs your support. PTSD is not his or her fault.
- ◆ **Educate yourself.** If your friend or loved one is a war vet, take a little time to learn about the situation. Soldiers go away to fight in foreign lands, but many times, the folks back home don't know much about the war they're fighting. If they were operating in the Helmand Province in Afghanistan or they were in the first or second battle of Fallujah in Iraq, find out why it was important. These men put their lives on the line to protect America, and as friends, the least we can do is learn more about what they did and why.
- ◆ **Stay Involved.** Avoidance is one of the main symptoms of PTSD. People who suffer it tend to avoid places or images that remind them of the trauma, but they may also avoid people, withdrawing even from friends and family. If your friend seems distant and doesn't return your calls, it's important to keep contacting them anyway. Don't take avoidance personally. Keep in touch, inviting them out to do stuff. You may get turned down a lot, but remember that it's a symptom.
- ◆ **Think about what your friend is going through.** It may be tempting to say things like *Snap out of it* or *Why can't you let it go, already?* Comments like this only make your friend feel bad about him- or herself. It's hard to 'just let go' of strong feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment. Also, when a friend confides in you, short careless remarks (*Wow, I'm glad I didn't have to do that* or *That sucks* or *Bummer!*) sound indifferent and insincere. It would be better to listen with compassion and not say anything.