

## Diagnosis, Classification, PTSD and CPTSD

Been given a diagnosis of PTSD or CPTSD can be helpful for children and young people, as it may help make sense of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are confusing or frightening and make access to support easier. Having a diagnosis can also help professionals to decide on the best treatment and help to measure the effectiveness of treatments.

### About Diagnoses

There are 2 Mental Health Diagnoses that are used to describe symptoms that some children, young people and adults develop after witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event or events. The diagnoses are called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD and Complex Post traumatic Stress Disorder or CPTSD. Children may still experience significant traumatic stress symptoms after experiencing traumatic events even when the diagnostic criteria of PTSD or CPTSD are not met and may still need help and support towards healing and recovery.

### Classification of Mental Disorders

PTSD is a mental health disorder and is diagnosed according to a number of symptoms and according to 2 different major classification systems called the DSM-5 and ICD-11.

- The International Classification of Diseases – 11<sup>th</sup> Revision (ICD-11) is produced and revised by the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – 5th Edition (DSM-5) is produced and revised by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

The criteria are similar but not identical as there are narrower/ fewer diagnostic ICD-11 criteria for PTSD compared with the DSM-5 criteria for PTSD. PTSD symptoms can be present differently in traumatised infants, children and young people ([see link](#)).

### DSM-5 and the diagnosis of PTSD

**Traumatic event(s).** Where a child or young person has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event that involved “actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence”.

**What are the symptoms?**

- Re-experiencing the traumatic event
- Avoidance behaviours
- Hyperarousal and reactivity.
- Negative change in thoughts and feelings.

**Duration of time**

Symptoms over 1 month

**Impairment and impact on functioning**

Where there is clinically significant distress or impairment of functioning.

### ICD-11 and the diagnosis of PTSD

Traumatic event(s). Where a child or young person has experienced or witnessed an event or events that have been “extremely threatening or horrific”.

#### Core Symptoms of PTSD

- Re-experiencing
- Avoidance
- Hyperarousal and reactivity.

#### Duration of time

Symptoms of at least several weeks.

#### Impairment and impact on functioning

Symptoms cause significant impairment in personal family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

## Complex Post traumatic stress disorder or CPTSD

### ICD-11 and the diagnosis of CPTSD

Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or Complex PTSD is a relatively new diagnosis and a mental health disorder that is diagnosed according to a number of symptoms in the ICD-11. (CPTSD is not found in the DSM-5). A diagnosis of CPTSD is made when the criteria for PTSD are met **plus** 3 further set of symptoms which are called ‘disturbances in self-organisation’ or ‘DSO’.

#### Core Symptoms of PTSD

- Re-experiencing
- Avoidance
- Hyperarousal and reactivity.

#### *Plus disturbances in self organisation or DSO*

- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Negative self concept (such as feeling of guilt, shame and loneliness)
- Interpersonal problems which impact on building and maintaining relationships

Some children who develop CPTSD have experienced Complex traumatic events. However not everyone who experiences complex traumatic events will then develop CPTSD as recovery from Trauma is common.

