

"PTSD"

What does mentally ill mean?

We humans sometimes become ill. Most of the time our body is affected: For example, we have a bad cold or a stomachache. When the soul becomes ill, it is called "mentally ill". The soul - by this we mean a person's thinking, feeling and laughing. When the soul is ill, people often no longer know exactly what they are saying or doing. Every person has a soul. Therefore, everyone can become mentally ill.

What does PTSD mean?

PTSD is the abbreviation for *post-traumatic stress disorder*. This is a difficult word for a mental illness. Affected people have experienced something that was exceptionally threatening and bad. For example, they have experienced themselves or other people around them being badly hurt and they could not help. They have experienced so much fear and stress that their soul has been injured. The injury to the soul is called *psychotrauma* or simply *trauma*. Since the soul cannot cope with the events, those affected relive the situations over and over again. For example, in the form of nightmares, but also in constantly recurring memories. Situations that are quite harmless to other people, for example at school, while shopping or at work, can remind people of what they have experienced and cause fear. The affected persons react in a way that is incomprehensible to those around them.

How can I tell that someone has PTSD?

Because of the mental illness, those affected withdraw more and more. Things they used to like to do no longer interest them. For example, sports, meeting friends, school or work. People with the illness are often irritable, sleep badly and are jumpy or suspicious. It is also difficult to concentrate, so that many people can no longer keep up with their work or concentrate for long periods at school. Since it is not a nice feeling to be afraid all the time, affected persons sometimes get very angry about it. They scream, lash out or break things. Some drink alcohol to forget what they have experienced; of course, this does not work, because the soul still knows, and one harms oneself more with the alcohol than it helps. There can be many other behaviours that are indicative of PTSD. These are just a few of the most typical.

Who can help?

Affected people need help from someone who is familiar with mental illnesses. A psychiatrist examines the patient, talks to him or her and can also prescribe medication to help with some of the problems. For example, to be able to sleep better again. However, PTSD cannot be cured with medication alone, so drugs are also the absolutely wrong remedy. Besides, psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists are also specially trained to work with mentally ill people. They do so in therapy.

What is therapy and how long does it last?

In therapy, a psychotherapist listens to the person in his or her practice once or twice a week, talks to him or her, looks for possible solutions and explains how to deal with the bad feelings. He can also instruct special exercises, such as relaxation exercises, physical exercises or creative exercises like painting or writing. Talking about what you have experienced is good for everyone! You should try yourself. You can talk to your doctor,

therapist, or supervisor about anything and ask any questions you have. You need a lot of patience if you or someone close to you is ill, because a mental illness takes much longer to heal than a cold. Therapy can take several months, sometimes even a year.

Do you have to go to hospital with a mental illness?

If you broke your leg, you have to go to a hospital for help. For some mental illnesses therapy in a doctor's office is not sufficient. Maybe it doesn't work in your accommodation, your care facility or in your family, and the illness could even get worse. Then the psychiatrist refers the person to a special hospital for mentally ill people: it is called psychiatric ward. There, psychiatrists and psychologists work together as therapists. Here, each ill person can take care of his or her problems until they get better. They receive support at any time of the day or night. A stay in a psychiatric ward can last several months.

Do you get completely well again? When?

A mental illness does not heal as easily as a cold or a broken leg. A mental illness may heal completely, there may be something left of it, or it may come back at some point. People with PTSD will probably never completely forget what they have experienced, but they learn to deal with it, have fun again and live their lives without fear. Sometimes something good can develop from the illness: maybe you find more meaning in what you do, think more carefully about what you want to do, where and with whom you want to spend your time, or you develop plans for your future life or a career aspiration.

Is it my fault that someone becomes mentally ill?

Mental illness is no one's fault. And it is not your fault when someone in your family, in your environment or even you become ill. The illness is not triggered by bad school grades, naughty behaviour or yourself. Those affected have experienced something very bad that they cannot process, and this is the reason why the disease develops. Their behaviour is always like that, no matter who is around them.

Are there others who are affected by PTSD?

There are a lot of children, young people and adults who are mentally ill. A few of them also have PTSD. But since many people are ashamed or don't dare to talk about it, people often don't know anything about it. Most of the time you can't tell that people are mentally ill because they don't wear a bandage or a plaster. You notice it more in their behaviour and mood.

Can I help affected people? How should I behave if my reference person (parents, relatives, acquaintances) is affected?

Having a mentally ill reference person is not easy. Affected people need to get professional help. The best way to help those affected is to take good care of yourself. That means you should continue to have fun with your friends, do sports, play and laugh. If you think you can't or shouldn't do this anymore, you should talk to an adult that you trust. This could be your supervisor, teacher, doctor, etc. Of course, you can be supportive, help around the house, look after younger siblings - but the responsibility lies with the adults. If you feel that everything is too much or that your tasks are too difficult, you must tell someone so that you can get help. It might also be good for you to create a place of retreat - for example, a cosy corner in the flat, a specific and protected place outside where you can withdraw, be yourself and recharge your batteries.

Who should I contact when things get so bad that I don't know what to do?

If your illness or the illness of someone close to you gets worse, if they drink too much alcohol, take drugs or if something happens that scares you, you should and must get help. It is best to talk to an adult you trust, such as relatives, neighbours, teachers, doctors, supervisors, the umA-team and many more. Sometimes it is not enough to tell just one person if that person is not well informed. In such case it is better to tell someone else. Keep on telling people until you feel that you are being helped.

If you can't think of anyone to talk to, there is a telephone number for all children and young people in Germany to call. You can call the "number against grief" free of charge from all over Germany during the day and night: 0800 1110333.

And what do I do when I am affected?

Don't worry. A mental illness is a completely natural thing that can happen to anyone. It is important for you to get professional help. You can get help from your doctor or a therapist. Contact an adult you trust to help you find professional help. This can be a doctor, a teacher, a supervisor, or other adults you trust. But keep in mind: sometimes it is not enough to only tell one person if that person is not well informed. Then it is better to tell someone else. Keep on telling people about it until you feel that you are being helped.

- ➔ You can always turn to the umA-team, the team supports you any time. You can find the contact details on the homepage.