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## Long-Term PTSD Problems

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This handout is provided for people who are already knowledgeable about PTSD and want additional information about its long-term impact. It can be upsetting to read, so ask your therapist first, and *do not read this if you feel too vulnerable right now*—you can wait until later in treatment. If you begin to read it and become upset, just stop.

In addition to the standard definition of PTSD described in Handout 1, there are other problems that may occur with PTSD, especially for people who have suffered repeated childhood abuse (Herman, 1992). You may have some and not others.

### 1. Your sense of self

- Helplessness, difficulty taking initiative
- Shame, guilt, self-blame
- Sense of being damaged
- Sense of being alien (e.g., not normal, less than human)
- Altered sense of age (feeling very old or very young)

### 2. Distorted views of the perpetrator

- Preoccupation with one's relationship with the perpetrator
- Belief that the perpetrator continues to have all of the power
- "Stockholm syndrome": idealizing the perpetrator, loving him or her, feeling grateful
- Sense of a supernatural or "fated" relationship with the perpetrator
- Acceptance of the perpetrator's ideas and beliefs

### 3. Your sense of meaning

- Loss of faith
- Despair
- Feeling that you don't have a future (such as not expecting to have a career, family, or children)

### 4. Your relationships

- Tendency to be revictimized (difficulty protecting yourself from harmful relationships)
- Isolation
- Difficulty having close relationships (distrust, conflicts, secrets)
- Tendency to view others as rescuers, victims, or perpetrators
- Tendency to repeat problematic relationship patterns (called "reenactment")

### 5. Your physical well-being

- Sleep problems
- More than average health problems
- Eating problems
- Risk for HIV/AIDS
- Substance abuse

(cont.)

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## 6. Managing your feelings and behaviors

- Suicidal thinking and attempts
- Difficulty tolerating depression and anxiety
- Explosive anger, difficulty expressing anger, or both
- Problems with sexuality (compulsive involvement, inhibited sexuality, confusion)
- Alternating between feeling numb (no feelings) and out of control (too much feeling)
- Use of destructive methods to cope with feelings (substance abuse, self-harm, destruction of property)

## 7. Your memory and perception

- Memory problems (no memory of traumatic events, or overwhelming memories)
- Dissociation (feeling "out of it," "losing time"); feeling as though you are not real, or that you are outside your body
- Reliving experiences (flashbacks, nightmares, preoccupation with the event)

## 8. Other emotional disorders

- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Panic disorder and other anxiety disorders
- Personality disorder

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*Acknowledgments:* Handouts 1, 2, and 4 draw from Herman (1992), Handout 1 draws from the American Psychiatric Association (1994) and from various professional journal articles. Ask your therapist for guidance if you would like to locate any of these sources.