

## PCL-5 with Criterion A

**Instructions:** This questionnaire asks about problems you may have had after a very stressful experience involving actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. It could be something that happened to you directly, something you witnessed, or something you learned happened to a close family member or close friend. Some examples are a serious accident; fire; disaster such as a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake; physical or sexual attack or abuse; war; homicide; or suicide.

First, please answer a few questions about your worst event, which for this questionnaire means the event that currently bothers you the most. This could be one of the examples above or some other very stressful experience. Also, it could be a single event (for example, a car crash) or multiple similar events (for example, multiple stressful events in a war-zone or repeated sexual abuse).

**Briefly identify the worst event (if you feel comfortable doing so):**

**How long ago did it happen?** \_\_\_\_\_ (please estimate if you are not sure)

**Did it involve actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

**How did you experience it?**

\_\_\_\_\_ It happened to me directly

\_\_\_\_\_ I witnessed it

\_\_\_\_\_ I learned about it happening to a close family member or close friend

\_\_\_\_\_ I was repeatedly exposed to details about it as part of my job (for example, paramedic, police, military, or other first responder)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other, please describe

**If the event involved the death of a close family member or close friend, was it due to some kind of accident or violence, or was it due to natural causes?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Accident or violence

\_\_\_\_\_ Natural causes

\_\_\_\_\_ Not applicable (the event did not involve the death of a close family member or close friend)

Second, below is a list of problems that people sometimes have in response to a very stressful experience. Keeping your worst event in mind, please read each problem carefully and then select one of the numbers to the right to indicate how much you have been bothered by that problem in the past month.

Your worst event: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>In the past month, how much were you bothered by:</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little bit</b>	<b>Moderately</b>	<b>Quite a bit</b>	<b>Extremely</b>
1. Repeated, disturbing, and unwanted memories of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
2. Repeated, disturbing dreams of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
3. Suddenly feeling or acting as if the stressful experience were actually happening again (as if you were actually back there reliving it)?	0	1	2	3	4
4. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
5. Having strong physical reactions when something reminded you of the stressful experience (for example, heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating)?	0	1	2	3	4
6. Avoiding memories, thoughts, or feelings related to the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
7. Avoiding external reminders of the stressful experience (for example, people, places, conversations, activities, objects, or situations)?	0	1	2	3	4
8. Trouble remembering important parts of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
9. Having strong negative beliefs about yourself, other people, or the world (for example, having thoughts such as: I am bad, there is something seriously wrong with me, no one can be trusted, the world is completely dangerous)?	0	1	2	3	4
10. Blaming yourself or someone else for the stressful experience or what happened after it?	0	1	2	3	4
11. Having strong negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame?	0	1	2	3	4
12. Loss of interest in activities that you used to enjoy?	0	1	2	3	4
13. Feeling distant or cut off from other people?	0	1	2	3	4
14. Trouble experiencing positive feelings (for example, being unable to feel happiness or have loving feelings for people close to you)?	0	1	2	3	4
15. Irritable behavior, angry outbursts, or acting aggressively?	0	1	2	3	4
16. Taking too many risks or doing things that could cause you harm?	0	1	2	3	4
17. Being "superalert" or watchful or on guard?	0	1	2	3	4
18. Feeling jumpy or easily startled?	0	1	2	3	4
19. Having difficulty concentrating?	0	1	2	3	4
20. Trouble falling or staying asleep?	0	1	2	3	4

## How is the PCL-5 scored and interpreted?

Respondents are asked to rate how bothered they have been by each of 20 items in the past month on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from 0-4. Items are summed to provide a **total severity** score (range = 0-80).

0 = Not at all      1 = A little bit      2 = Moderately      3 = Quite a bit      4 = Extremely

The PCL-5 can determine a **provisional** diagnosis in two ways:

- Summing all 20 items (range 0-80) and using a cut-point score of 31-33 appears to be reasonable based upon current psychometric work. However, when choosing a cutoff score, it is essential to consider the goals of the assessment and the population being assessed. The lower the cutoff score, the more lenient the criteria for inclusion, increasing the possible number of false-positives. The higher the cutoff score, the more stringent the inclusion criteria and the more potential for false-negatives.
- Treating each item rated as 2 = “Moderately” or higher as a symptom endorsed, then following the DSM-5 diagnostic rule which requires at least: 1 Criterion B item (questions 1-5), 1 Criterion C item (questions 6-7), 2 Criterion D items (questions 8-14), 2 Criterion E items (questions 15-20). In general, use of a cutoff score tends to produce more reliable results than the *DSM-5* diagnostic rule.

If a patient meets a provisional diagnosis using either of the methods above, he or she needs further assessment (e.g., CAPS-5) to confirm a diagnosis of PTSD.

There are currently no empirically derived severity ranges for the PCL-5.

## How might the PCL-5 help my patients?

### Treatment Planning

When given at an intake or assessment session, the PCL-5 may be used to help determine the appropriate next steps or treatment options. For example:

- A total score of 31-33 or higher suggests the patient may benefit from PTSD treatment. The patient can either be referred to a PTSD specialty clinic or be offered an evidence-based treatment for PTSD such as Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR).
- Scores lower than 31-33 may indicate the patient either has subthreshold symptoms of PTSD or does not meet criteria for PTSD, and this information should be incorporated into treatment planning.

Keeping the goal of the assessment in mind, it may make sense to lower the cut-point score to maximize the detection of possible cases needing additional services or treatment. A higher cut-point score should be considered when attempting to minimize false positives.