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and get your life back on track

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

FOR

DUMMIES®



Mark Goulston, MD

Former Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, UCLA

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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder For Dummies

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WILEY

Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder For Dummies ®

Published by

Wiley Publishing, Inc.

111 River St.

Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

www.wiley.com

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Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2007936459

ISBN: 978-0-470-04922-8

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Author

Mark Goulston, MD, received his medical degree from Boston University, completed his psychiatry training at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute, and is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association.

He has been a UCLA Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry for more than 20 years, and in 2004-05, he was selected as one of America's Top Psychiatrists by the Washington, D.C.-based Consumers' Research Council. He is the co-author of *Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior* (Perigee, 1996) and *The 6 Secrets of a Lasting Relationship: How to Fall in Love Again . . . and Stay There* (Perigee, 2002). He's also the author of *Get Out of Your Own Way at Work . . . and Help Others Do the Same* (Perigee, 2006).

Dr. Goulston has written the nationally syndicated *Knight Ridder/Tribune* college newspaper column "Relationships 101" and regular columns for *EMMY Magazine* and *Fast Company*. In addition, he served as the Parenting Coach and Couples Coach at Time Warner's ParentTime site and iVillage and was the lead life-skills coach at LifeScape. He has taught or lectured at UCLA, USC, and Pepperdine University. Dr. Goulston has also served on the boards of Free Arts for Abused Children and the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention.

Because of his special interest in suicide prevention and teenage violence, Dr. Goulston has trained FBI and

police hostage negotiators and has been frequently called upon to address these and other issues on CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, and BBC news programs and in the print media, including the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time* magazine, *Wall Street Journal*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *USA Today*.

For more information, please visit his Web site at www.markgoulston.com.

Dedication

To the soldiers, firefighters, and police officers and their families who have sacrificed so much to create peace on Earth, that this book may help them regain peace of mind.

Author's Acknowledgments

I am fortunate to have been taught, influenced, and inspired by some of the brightest and most caring individuals in the field of mental health, including Drs. Wilfred Bion, Herbert Linden, Lars Lofgren, Karl Menninger, Robert Pynoos, Robert Stoller, Louis Jolyon West, Carl Whitaker, and Peter Whybrow. Their collective wisdom serves as the magnetic north on my compass, and I feel blessed that I could turn to them in person and later on in memory to guide me in trying to ease the suffering of the thousands of people I have seen in my career.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Edwin Shneidman, one of the pioneers in the study of suicide and founder of the American Association of Suicidology. From this teacher, mentor, and now dear friend, I learned more about bringing hope to the hopeless than from any other individual.

On a different note, I am eternally grateful to the late Dr. William MacNary, who as Dean of Students at Boston University School of Medicine safely shepherded me during my medical school training through one of the most difficult and traumatic times in my professional life. My subsequent career and dedication to helping those in difficulty have been an effort to pass on to my patients

the kindness that Dean MacNary showed me when I most needed it.

With regard to this book, I am thankful for the enthusiastic support of my agents Bill Gladstone and Ming Russell of Waterside Productions, the steadfast input of my acquisitions editor Tracy Boggier and my project editor Kristin DeMint at Wiley, the polishing done by copy editor Danielle Voirol, and deft assistance with this manuscript by Alison Blake.

I also appreciate the patience and support (and tolerance, especially during those tight deadlines) of my wife, Lisa; my three children, Lauren, Emily, and Billy; and my business partners, Keith Ferrazzi and Peter Winick at the consulting company Ferrazzi Greenlight, through which I do much of my consulting and coaching work.

Finally, I am indebted to the individuals, families, and couples who have entrusted me with the hurt and horror from their lives and in doing so enabled me to help them walk out of the darkness and into the light.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Cartoons: Rich Tennant (www.the5thwave.com)

Composition Services

Project Coordinator: Patrick Redmond

Layout and Graphics: Claudia Bell, Stacie Brooks,
Reuben Davis, Barbara Moore, Christine Williams

Illustrations: Kathryn Born, MA

Anniversary Logo Design: Richard Pacifico

Proofreaders: Cynthia Fields, Joni Heredia

Indexer: Cheryl Duksta

Special Help

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Introduction

Life is an unpredictable adventure, and it can slip you some pretty big shocks now and then. Often these jolts are exciting, and although they may rattle you briefly, they make for great stories and add richness to your life. But sometimes events can pull the rug out from under you, leaving you feeling shocked, terrified, unsheltered, and alone. These experiences can shake you to your core, altering your feelings about yourself, other people, and the world around you. Consider these people's words:

A combat survivor says, "The old me died in that war. I don't recognize the person I am now."

A woman who survived a rape says, "People say I'm cold and unfeeling now. They don't know that inside, I'm falling apart."

A heart attack survivor says, "I feel so lost. It's like I see my old life in the distance, but I can't find my way back to it."

All these people have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They're scared, angry, and sad — and they have every reason to be. A traumatic life event turned their lives upside down, transforming their once safe and happy world into a terrifying and alien place they fear they'll never escape.

The most important message of this book is this: *There is a road out of this terrible place.* The fact that you're still afraid doesn't mean you're in any danger. It just takes the will and the way for your heart and soul to accept what the logical part of your mind already knows. I've been treating patients with PTSD for more than two decades, and the vast majority of them make the journey back to wellness. Often, it's not an easy journey — or a short one. But there is help, there is hope, and there is a better future ahead. In short, there's life after PTSD — and a good one, I might add. In this book, I explain how to set your course for that brighter future.

About This Book

I have piles of academic books on PTSD, but they're pretty dry reading. My goal in this book is to cut through all those fancy words and give you the basic facts you really need about what PTSD is and how you can overcome it. I also lighten these pages with a few jokes because I figure you have a sense of humor and can use a good laugh — even though you and I both know that PTSD is a very serious matter.

If you're a trauma survivor with PTSD, this book clearly lays out the steps you can take to reclaim your life and your future. In addition to giving you info about a wide range of therapy approaches, I offer advice on self-help steps that can aid in taming your PTSD symptoms.

If you're caring for a person fighting PTSD, you can find the tools you need to play an active part in your loved one's recovery. Because partners and parents play an especially powerful role in helping a person heal from PTSD, I cover the roles of these very important people in depth. In addition, I offer helpful advice for extended family members and friends.

Whether you're battling PTSD yourself or caring for someone who's facing this challenge, you can begin these pages with a sense of hope — because the fight against PTSD is a battle you can win.

Conventions Used in This Book

If you have PTSD (or are struggling to cope along with someone who does) you're probably feeling more than a little frazzled. To make the process of gathering information as simple as possible for you, I use the following tools throughout the book to help you navigate through the text quickly and easily.

- ✓ When I introduce a new term, I put it in *italics* to highlight it — and if it's medical jargon (which I avoid as much as possible), I offer a plain-English explanation.
- ✓ I use **boldface** to set off important keywords and numbered steps.

✓ I use monofont to indicate useful Web sites. If a Web address breaks across two lines of text, I don't add an extra hyphen or any spaces, so just type exactly what you see.

What You're Not to Read

I hope you find every part of this book valuable — but don't feel like you need to read every word. Instead, pick and choose the material that suits your needs.

For instance, if you're not into the scientific nitty-gritty about PTSD, you can skip any text marked with the Technical Stuff icon. You can also pass over the sidebars if you're pressed for time — but consider giving these gray boxes a quick glance because they contain lots of useful advice and inspiring stories about others who've walked the path that you or your loved one is on. And of course, feel free to ignore sections that don't have anything to do with your life; for instance, skip the chapter on PTSD in children if you're interested only in adult PTSD.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I kept a clear picture of you, the reader, in mind. Therefore, I had to assume a few things about you and your needs:

- ✓ You're relatively new to PTSD. Maybe you're newly diagnosed or wondering whether you have the disorder — or maybe you're a relative or friend who's hoping to help a person who's struggling with PTSD.
- ✓ If you have PTSD, you want to know all your options so you can have an active say in your treatment plan.
- ✓ You're willing to face your problem head-on and seek help if you do have PTSD.
- ✓ You want to know that there's real help for the pain you're suffering. (And yes — there is!)

How This Book Is Organized

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder For Dummies is organized into six parts and 18 chapters. Here's a quick look at each part.

Part I: The Basics of PTSD

In Chapter 1, you find a quick overview of the history of PTSD, the major causes of this disorder, and the numbers of people it affects. Chapter 2 gives you the lowdown on what *trauma* is and describes the factors that can put you at extra risk for developing PTSD. Next, in Chapter 3, I describe the key symptoms of PTSD and talk about other disorders — such as depression and substance abuse problems — that often complicate the PTSD picture. In addition, I describe the very different symptoms that kids with PTSD can show.

Chapter 4 tackles a very different topic: what experts know (and don't know) about *preventing* PTSD. In this chapter, I talk about what does and doesn't help when you're trying to stop PTSD before it starts. I also offer info about new drug treatments that show promise in short-circuiting the brain changes that can trigger PTSD symptoms.

Part II: Getting a Diagnosis and Drafting a Plan

Maybe you're wondering whether you have PTSD — or maybe you already have a diagnosis but you're not sure where to go from here. Either way, you can find answers to your questions in this part.

In Chapter 5, I offer a self-test to help you determine whether your symptoms point to PTSD, and I provide advice on getting a diagnosis if they do. Chapter 6 describes how and where to locate good therapists and tells you the questions you should ask before deciding whether a particular therapist is right for you. And Chapter 7 talks about the steps you can take *before* therapy to make sure you get optimal results when you start treatment.

Part III: Choosing the Right Treatment Approach

Today's treatments are highly effective in reducing the pain of PTSD, but a treatment that works like a charm for one person can miss the mark with another. When you know the range of treatments available for PTSD, you can choose the approach that works best for you.

In this part, I describe a wide variety of approaches to treating PTSD. Chapter 8 talks about cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), the most widely used therapy for PTSD. Chapter 9 describes the drug treatments that sometimes play an important role in recovery, and Chapter 10 describes a host of additional therapies and offers some stats on how helpful they are.

Part IV: Healing and Rebuilding during and after Treatment

The most important person on your recovery team is *you* — and in this part, I describe the steps you can take to keep your progress on track. First, I talk about what you can expect from therapy and how to maximize your results. Next, I offer a cornucopia of ways to enhance your mental and physical health, stop stress in its tracks, erase the hidden agendas that hold you back, and enjoy life's pleasures (including intimacy and sexuality) again. I also talk about how to get back into the stream of life — jobs, friendships, life goals — when you get PTSD under control.

However, you're not the only important person involved in your recovery. That's why I also talk about the ways in which PTSD strains family ties — and the steps you can take to make those bonds strong again.