Most people will go through a traumatic event at some time in their lives. Stress reactions are normal after such events. But sometimes such experiences lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Do I Have PTSD?
Traumatic events can produce several reactions. Some people have upsetting memories or thoughts. They might have trouble sleeping, or they might feel irritable, anxious, or have trouble concentrating. Most people get better with time. But you should get help if your symptoms
• Are very distressing
• Cause problems in your life
• Last longer than 2 or 3 months
Such symptoms might mean that you have PTSD.

What Kinds of Events Can Cause PTSD?
Traumatic events include physical or sexual violence, serious injury, or being close to possible death. You don’t need to go through a traumatic event yourself to experience trauma. You might have stress reactions if you witness traumatic events happening to others. You might also have stress reactions if you find out that someone close to you has had a traumatic event. This is especially true if the event was violent or life-threatening. Also, some jobs expose people to traumatic events. For example, police officers and firefighters may eventually have stress reactions.

What Are the Symptoms of PTSD?
There are 4 types of PTSD symptoms. People with PTSD have at least some of each type. Symptoms might include
• Reliving the traumatic event. For example, you might have nightmares about it or have repeated, intrusive memories of it. You also might have intense reactions to anything that reminds you of it. You might even briefly feel it is happening all over again.
• Avoiding any thoughts or feelings about the event. You also might avoid things that remind you of the event.
• Having bad feelings about yourself or the world. You might blame yourself or other people. You also might feel a strong sense of shame, guilt, fear, or anger. Or you might feel less able to enjoy things, have positive feelings, or feel close to people in your life.
• Having trouble sleeping or concentrating. You might feel jump or irritable. You might even feel or act more reckless than before.

What Can I Do If I Think I Might Have PTSD?
If you think that you or someone you care about may have PTSD, talk to your doctor. There are effective treatments. If your doctor thinks you have PTSD, he or she might prescribe medication to help with the symptoms. He or she also might refer you to a mental health professional for psychotherapy (talk therapy) or medication. Many people find that a combination of both is helpful.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
• National Institute of Mental Health
• National Center for PTSD
  www.ptsd.va.gov/public/index.asp
• International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies
  www.istss.org/public-resources.aspx