

## CHAPTER FOUR

# *Why is my parent so tense and sad?*

## *Anxiety and depression*

**A**lthough PTSD is one reaction to trauma, there are actually many different ways people respond to traumatic events. This chapter will explain three specific challenges faced by trauma survivors:

- **Panic attacks**
- **Social anxiety**
- **Depression**

You may have recognized your parent's behavior in the lists of PTSD symptoms in the last few chapters. Or, you may find that the conditions reviewed in this chapter better describe your parent. It's also possible you will see your parent dealing with more than one problem, since people with PTSD have an increased risk of having several mental health difficulties.

Because living through trauma can be painful, it makes sense that your parent may feel anxious and depressed. After all, survivors often replay the traumatic event over and over in their minds—that can be hard to deal with. Parents who have experienced trauma often feel badly that they are too nervous to attend their kids' games or music concerts. These parents know that they are hard to get along with and are frustrated that their anger is out of control.

Please remember that every person is unique. It's impossible to predict how a specific person will respond to trauma.

## Panic Attacks

A panic attack (or anxiety attack) involves suddenly feeling extremely afraid or uncomfortable. The person has several of the following symptoms:

- Racing or pounding heart
- Sweating, chills, or hot flashes
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling short of breath
- Chest pain
- Feeling of choking
- Upset stomach
- Dizziness or feeling light-headed
- Feeling afraid of losing control, going crazy, or dying
- Numbness or tingling sensation

Panic attacks are VERY frightening and usually last about ten minutes. Some people have attacks several times a day, while others may have them a few times per month. Sometimes the person can identify what set off the attack, while at other times it seems to come “out of the blue.” People never know when an attack may come on. Therefore, individuals are worried about when they may have a panic attack. Sometimes people become isolated and rarely leave their homes for fear of having an attack in a public situation.

Many trauma survivors experience panic attacks. The attack may result from being exposed to a reminder of the trauma—or the panic attack may seem to come from nowhere.

Let’s meet Bill to learn how trauma survivors may be affected by panic.

Bill is a 44-year-old who was in a serious motorcycle accident. He spent three months in the hospital, followed by six months at home in a full-body cast. Now Bill is back at work, but he is never sure what will set off some strange feelings.

Often when he is in traffic, sees another motorcycle, or smells gasoline, he begins to sweat and his whole body shakes. He becomes dizzy and feels like he might throw up. He fears he may be having a heart attack, or maybe even going crazy. He is always worried that he may be in a situation where having another episode would be really embarrassing.



After surviving a traumatic motorcycle accident, Bill is experiencing panic attacks.



## HOW ABOUT MY FAMILY?

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- Has your parent ever had a panic attack? If so, what happened?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What was the experience like for you? How did you feel?

Family members often don't know how to help their loved one during a panic attack. You may feel helpless and worried. You certainly cannot prevent your parent from having a panic attack, and you cannot make it stop. Your parent may appreciate your help in getting to a quiet, calm place and getting adult assistance if needed.

- What is most helpful for your parent while he/she is having an attack? (If you're not sure, ask your mom/dad during a calm time.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Has your parent withdrawn from others due to these panic attacks? If so, how?