

FM-PTS-02

SESSION 2

PTSD SYMPTOMS, COPING, AND THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

12 Weeks to a Stronger You | Post Traumatic Strength

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THE FOUR CORE SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

When PTSD takes hold, it tends to show up in four main ways. Understanding these categories helps you name what you are experiencing instead of feeling swallowed by something you cannot identify.

- **Re-Experiencing:** Flashbacks, nightmares, and emotional or physical reactions triggered by reminders of the trauma. This is the brain replaying the event as if it is happening again. A sound, a smell, a date on the calendar — any of these can pull you back.
- **Avoidance:** The natural response to pain is to avoid it. With PTSD, this means steering clear of thoughts, people, places, and activities connected to the trauma. Avoidance feels like protection, but over time it shrinks your world and keeps the trauma powerful.
- **Negative Thoughts and Moods:** Persistent pessimistic thoughts, hopelessness, guilt, shame, or emotional numbness. Feeling cut off from other people or from things you used to enjoy. This is not simply sadness — it is a change in how you see yourself and the world.
- **Hyperarousal:** Your nervous system stays stuck in threat-detection mode — heightened alertness, irritability, difficulty sleeping, trouble concentrating, and an exaggerated startle response. The body does not get the message that the danger has passed.

THE FOUR CORE SYMPTOMS OF PTSD (CONTINUED)

PTSD symptoms are your brain's attempt to protect you. They made sense in the moment they developed. Learning to manage them is about helping your brain understand that the threat is no longer present.

COPING STRATEGIES THAT ACTUALLY WORK

Knowing you have PTSD is one thing. Building a daily practice that reduces its grip on your life is another. There is no single solution, but there are strategies backed by research that work for many veterans. The goal is to find the combination that works for you.

Trauma-Focused Therapy is the gold standard. Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure (PE) are the two most evidence-based treatments for PTSD. They work by helping your brain process the trauma instead of keeping it frozen in the past. If you are not in therapy, that conversation with a provider is worth having.

Grounding techniques help when you are triggered. The 5-4-3-2-1 method is simple: name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can physically feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. It pulls your attention back into the present moment and out of the traumatic one.

Physical activity works. Exercise reduces cortisol and adrenaline — the stress hormones that fuel hyperarousal — and releases endorphins that improve mood. Even a 20-minute walk makes a measurable difference. You do not need a gym membership. You need to move.

Sleep hygiene matters more than people realize. Poor sleep makes every PTSD symptom worse. A consistent sleep routine, limiting screens before bed, and keeping your sleeping space as calm as possible all help regulate your nervous system. Sleep is not a luxury. It is part of your recovery.

COPING STRATEGIES THAT ACTUALLY WORK (CONTINUED)

Social connection is protective. Isolation makes PTSD worse. Even brief, low-pressure contact with people you trust has been shown to reduce symptom severity. You do not have to talk about your trauma. Just being around people who care about you is enough to start with.

You do not have to choose one strategy. Building a toolkit — therapy, movement, grounding, sleep, connection — gives you multiple ways to manage symptoms across different situations and days.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

Emotional intelligence — often called EQ — is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage your own emotions, while also being able to understand the emotions of others. It sounds simple. It is not easy. But it is learnable. That is the good news.

There are four EQ skills, organized under two main categories. The first is personal competence — skills that focus on you: self-awareness and self-management. The second is social competence — skills that focus on your relationships with others: social awareness and relationship management.

The reason EQ matters so much in recovery from trauma is that PTSD attacks the very things EQ is built on. Trauma disrupts your ability to read your own emotions accurately, hijacks your behavior under stress, and damages your ability to trust and connect with others. Building EQ is, in many ways, rebuilding what trauma tries to dismantle.

SELF-AWARENESS: THE FOUNDATION

Self-awareness is the ability to accurately perceive your own emotions in the moment and understand your tendencies across situations. It includes knowing your typical reactions to challenges, stress, specific people, and difficult circumstances.

Here is something important: self-awareness is not about uncovering deep, dark secrets or hidden psychological wounds. It comes from developing a straightforward and honest understanding of what makes you tick — what triggers your anger, what makes you shut down, what lights you up, and what drags you under.

One of the most surprising truths about self-awareness is that simply thinking about it helps you build it. Even when what you are initially doing is focusing on what you do wrong, that honest attention is the beginning of change. You cannot fix what you refuse to see.

Having self-awareness means you are not afraid of your emotional mistakes. They tell you what you should be doing differently. As self-awareness increases, satisfaction with life increases. That is not a coincidence.

Self-awareness is the foundation of the entire EQ framework. When you can accurately see your own emotions, every other skill — managing them, reading others, improving your relationships — becomes more possible. You do not need to be perfect. You just need to be honest.

LOOKING AHEAD

LOOKING AHEAD — SESSION 3

Next session we go deeper into combat stress and build on what we started with emotional intelligence — moving into self-management, social awareness, and the daily practices that make these skills real.

Before next session, try this: Three times each day, pause and ask yourself — "What emotion am I feeling right now?" Just notice. That is self-awareness in practice.