

WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Affecting over 40 million people nationwide each year, anxiety disorders are a group of mental illnesses that cause people to feel excessively frightened, distressed, or uneasy during situations in which most other people would not experience these same feelings. Examples include:

PANIC DISORDER Panic attacks, sudden feelings of terror that strike repeatedly and without warning. Physical symptoms include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, abdominal discomfort and fear of dying.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD) Repeated, intrusive and unwanted thoughts or rituals that seem impossible to control.

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD) Chronic, exaggerated worry about everyday routine life events and activities, lasting at least six months; almost always anticipating the worst even though there is little reason to expect it.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) When people experience or witness a traumatic event such as abuse, a natural disaster, or extreme violence, it is normal to be distressed and to feel “on edge” for some time after this experience. Some people who experience traumatic events have severe symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks, being very easily startled or scared or feeling numb/angry/irritable/distracted. If these symptoms last for weeks/months after the event, the person may be suffering from PTSD.

RON'S STORY

TRADITIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY has been very important in my recovery from substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For many years after the Vietnam War, I experienced terrible symptoms of PTSD. Those years were punctuated by visits to jail and mental hospitals and eventually culminated in the loss of my wife and children to divorce. Eventually I found my way to Alcoholics Anonymous and sought help at a vet-center. I was referred to a clinical psychologist and was finally diagnosed with PTSD. It was a great relief to know that I had a treatable mental illness and that I was not just a hopelessly bad person. This would not have been possible had I not found the spiritual strength I needed in 12-step programs and native spirituality. Today, I have earned two master's degrees in clinical psychology. I am currently the Director of Recovery and Resiliency for Tennessee for TennCare. I also assist my wife in running a rescue operation for dogs in Knoxville, Tenn. and still participate in my traditional Native American belief system. I pass along what my experiences have taught me: that as long as we have hope, we can recover.