

June is Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness Month

In observance of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month,

Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services encour-

ages everyone to respect the impact trauma has on developing children, adults, and veterans. Trauma exposure can, in many cases, result in chronic stress and anxiety, developmental delays in children, mental illness, and substance abuse. In worst cases, it can even lead to suicide.

Starting in 2010, Congress named June 27 PTSD Awareness Day (S. Res. 455). In 2014, the Senate designated the full month of June for National PTSD Awareness (S. Res. 481). The purpose of PTSD Awareness Month is to encourage everyone to raise public awareness of PTSD and the availability of effective treatments.

PTSD is a mental health condition that can occur after someone has been exposed to a single traumatic event or multi-



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ple traumatic events, such as, but not limited to, sexual or physical assault, natural or human-made disaster, and war-related combat stress.

The National Comorbidity Study (NCS) established the prevalence of trauma in the lives of the general U.S. population. Presented with a list of 11 types of traumatic experiences and a 12th "other" category, 60.7 percent of men and 51.2 percent of women reported experiencing at least one trauma in their lifetime.

Re-experiencing painful memories following the traumatic event are natural. Individuals cope with trauma exposure differently and the duration of trauma impairment also varies depending upon the individual's resilience, their abundance of protective factors, and the presence of formal and informal supports.

"If stress reactions to trauma do not improve over time and it

disrupts everyday life, then it's important to recognize if you or someone you love may be experiencing PTSD," says Stacy Park, Director of Clinical Outpatient Services at Ridgeview. "Common symptoms may include intrusive thoughts or troubling dreams about the traumatic event, acute emotional responses or flashbacks triggered by a memory of the trauma, an avoidance of thinking or talking about the trauma, or even changes in regular sleep and appetite patterns," added Park.

According to the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, "PTSD is the most prevalent mental health challenge faced by our Nation's Veterans. We want to encourage people to seek effective PTSD treatment and to know they are not alone." Awareness has a local impact, too. Data from the 2015 Annual Report indicates 19,641 veterans reside in Anderson, Campbell, Morgan, Roane, and Scott counties combined.

Children and families exposed to the trauma of abuse or neglect are also adversely impacted,

and the effects can be long lasting. The Department of Children's Services 2015 Annual Report reveals 446 children from the East Region were in state custody (East Region comprises the five aforementioned counties in addition to Union, Loudon, and Monroe). Approximately 35 percent of those children were in custody longer than fifteen months.

Today, there are effective trauma-informed interventions available for treating PTSD in children, adults, and veterans. With early trauma screening for children entering DCS custody, appropriate care and treatment can be part of timely case planning while they're in care. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Trauma-Focused CBT are effective types of counseling, along with support groups and medication, if necessary.

"Without treatment," warns Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner Douglas Varney in a recent TDMHSAS release, "PTSD can lead to sub-

stance abuse, reliving the terror, heart attacks, depression, dementia, suicide, and/or stroke. Recovery is a gradual, ongoing process and taking that first step toward treatment can be the start of a more manageable and happy life."

The impact of trauma on friends, neighbors, and those we love is never far away, nor should our awareness and recognition of PTSD symptoms. For those who are deeply impacted by trauma and its debilitating effect on everyday life, it's wise to equip yourself with the awareness of knowing where and to whom you should turn. Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services is one such place that will help you take that first step toward hope, healing, and recovery.

Ridgeview is a private, not for profit community mental health center with offices located in Anderson, Campbell, Morgan, Roane, and Scott counties.

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