

Post-traumatic stress disorder defined by three symptoms

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a psychological condition that fascinates the general public. Many people associate this condition with Vietnam War veterans, but greatly overestimate the number of individuals who actually suffer from the disorder. In reality, the disorder has been around since long before the Vietnam War and can occur in anyone who experiences, witnesses, or feels threatened as a result of a traumatic event that involves death or serious injury to oneself or others. It is also important to keep in mind that the majority of people that do experience such trauma, do not develop this disorder.

**High Plains
Mental Health
Center
Plain Sense
Karen Schueler**

There are three major symptoms that define this condition. First, the individual experiences intrusive recollections of the event that are beyond simple memories or dreams, which are powerful and intensive psychological experiences. People feel the full intensity of the fear, panic or horror that they experienced during the initial

trauma, even if the event occurred several years past. These recollections often occur as the result of certain triggers; specific sounds such as a loud crash or bang; unusual odors, such as something burning; or factors that resemble an aspect of the trauma such as weather conditions, a news report, or an awareness of the anniversary of the event.

The second major symptom is the avoidance or numbing of emotions; the person will avoid situations or stimuli that they think may trigger the frightening recollection and resulting feelings. Unfortunately, they will also avoid family gatherings, church services, school events and other social situations due to their fears.

The resulting increase in isolation can lead to additional problems of depression, alcohol, or substance abuse, as well as marital and family conflict.

The third general symptom of the disorder is hyper-arousal or hyper-vigilance, where the person is on constant alert and will have a sharper startle response and is especially noticeable in soldiers returning from war. The person's efforts to "stay safe" and keep their family safe is often misunderstood by others. In addition, the person may experience difficulty sleeping or insomnia and increased anger and irritability.

The United States Department of Defense estimates that between 15 to 25 percent of Afghanistan

and Iraqi War veterans may develop post-traumatic stress disorder. This translates into the possibility of 255,000 to 493,000 cases of the disorder. If any of these symptoms sound familiar, and you have concerns about a loved one or friend, contact your medical provider or local mental health center for further information.

(Contributed by Karen Schueler, MS, LCPC, Manager/Prevention,

Education and Outreach Department. The views expressed here are those of the individual writer and should not be considered a replacement for seeking professional help. Mail questions to: High Plains Mental Health Center, PLAIN SENSE, Prevention, Education and Outreach Department, 208 East 7th, Hays, KS 67601. (Questions will be formatted and answered in a manner that insures confidentiality).

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Pets: Rabies transmittable to humans

(Continued from Page 1) and tears. Rabies is transmittable to humans and is nearly always fatal within anywhere from two days to five years after exposure.

"There is only one way to test for rabies, and that's to euthanize the animal and send its head into the state for testing," said Norton Animal Control Officer Sherry Hickman. "A current rabies vaccination will prevent your pet from getting rabies, even if he's been exposed to it by another animal."

According to a pamphlet available for free at the Norton Animal Clinic, kittens should get three distemper shots, a rabies shot and two feline leukemia vaccinations. Feline leukemia is actually a virus, not cancer. Cats can be born with it, they can fight off the infection and become totally immune, they can become carriers of the disease but not be sickened by it, have a weakened immune system from it, or die from it.

Between four and six months of age, puppies and kittens should be spayed or neutered to prevent unwanted litters, behavior problems and even some types of cancers.

Puppies and kittens also need to be protected from parasites, such as fleas, ticks and heartworms, according to the pamphlet.

"There is no such thing as a free puppy or kitten if you take care of it the right way," said Mrs. Douglas.

Also, said Mrs. Douglas, it costs money to raise healthy litters. Some breeders will cut corners to have a litter ready for the Christmas season.

"They may have bred the dog too close to the last litter, weaned too early, skipped shots or they may not have properly socialized the puppies or kittens. Litters born without enough time in between is harmful to a dog and cat. Weaning too early or not socializing pets at

a young age can lead to behavior problems," said Mrs. Douglas. "That's not to say everyone who has puppies and kittens at Christmas has done any of those things, but it does happen."

Puppy and kitten mills are widespread on the internet. The Humane Society of the United States' website, www.hsus.org, has a good breeder check-list for prospective pet owners to use when getting a puppy or kitten.

Puppies and kittens require constant care and supervision until they have been house-trained and taught the rules of the house. Supplies for feeding, watering, bathing, exercising, playing, and keeping track of your pet need to be bought, said Mrs. Hickman.

Two of the cheapest things to get are a city tag and a rabies tag for a dog or cat, which costs \$5.00 in Norton. A city tag identifies your pet in case he's ever found wandering around. A rabies tag is proof of a rabies vaccination.

Kenneling costs is another consideration, or if taking a pet on vacation with the family, finding hotel rooms that allow pets, said Mrs. Douglas. "After the movie *101 Dalmatians* came out, Dalmatian rescue groups had a 25 percent increase in surrendered dogs. People got the dogs without realizing everything that comes with it. All because of a movie," said Mrs. Douglas.

Then there are the other considerations such as purebred or mixed, coat length and grooming, temperament, exercise needs, space needs, trainability and size, said Mrs. Douglas.

"A great alternative to giving pet as a gift would be to buy some of the pet supplies, like food and water dishes and a leash and collar instead of a pet, and give it to the person you would have given an animal to. Then take that person

to the shelter and let them pick out which animal they like," said Mrs. Douglas.

"That's a great idea," said Mrs. Hickman. "Letting people pick out which animal they want will probably work out better in the long run."

Another alternative to giving a puppy or kitten for a gift is giving an adult cat or dog. They are usually already housebroken, have had their first year shots, and for dogs, have already gotten through their chewing stage. Some dogs may already have had some obedience training. They may still need to be spayed or neutered, though.

"Sometimes, it seems like dogs and cats that have been in the shelter know they've been given a second chance, and they're grateful," said Mrs. Hickman. "I've had people who have adopted a dog or cat from the shelter say it has worked out really well for them."

Both Mrs. Douglas and Mrs. Hickman know people who have been given pets as gifts, and for some of those people, it has worked out wonderfully.

"They were probably already ready for a pet," said Mrs. Hickman. Of course, Mrs. Hickman also knows a lot of people who weren't ready for a pet, and it ends up at the shelter.

"The shelter is a temporary waystation for animals, not a permanent place," said Mrs. Hickman. "Not all of the animals that come through here leave with a family. Some get sent to rescue groups, and some are euthanized. In about May, when the "ready for Christmas" puppies and kitten are about four months old, the shelter fills up. The kids have lost interest, or no longer want to take care of them and the parents can't or won't, or the boyfriend and girlfriend have broken up. It's very sad to see."

County: project supports visitor center

(Continued from Page 1) ment prior to the commissioners' signatures. The project is in support of the Norton Visitor Center. Reggie Beckman, Norton Coun-

ty Noxious Weed, talked with the commission about republishing the budget. Mr. Beckman said he had the cash needed to republish. He also talked about the price of chemicals and ordering for spring.

Mr. Beckman said the prices are staying high and not coming down very fast, and that he will wait on any purchase of chemicals.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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