

Why Is Mommy Like She Is?

A Book For Kids About PTSD

Deployment Edition

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Symptoms of PTSD discussed in this book are common to many women but not present in every woman with PTSD. I have tried to touch on the symptoms and feelings which I felt were important and troubling to kids, and which current research also suggests are of importance.

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“I used to think that if I was quiet as a mouse, my Mommy would be okay, but that’s not true,” Josie said. “My Mom has PTSD.”

“That’s right,” Sharon said. Sharon was the therapist. The kids came to see her to talk about their Mommies

“My Mommy has it too. What’s PTSD?” Cassie asked.

“Sharon explained it to me,” Josie said.

“P is for post, which means after.

“T is for traumatic—dangerous.

“So the letters PT stand for Post-Traumatic, but they mean after danger.”

“What about the S and the D, Josie?” Mark said.

“S is for stress, because it’s very stressful to be in danger and to be hurt,” Josie said.

“D is for disorder. That means your life gets out of order. Your life isn’t like it would have been if you’d never been in danger or never been hurt.

“The whole word, PTSD, means after the terrible danger, a person can have difficulties which they call PTSD. You didn’t cause it, you can’t control it by being good, and you can’t cure it. That is your Mommy’s job. But you also don’t have to misunderstand it or take it personally, even though it can feel very personal. You can just think she is having a hard day and has been through a lot.”

“PTSD is a normal reaction to really bad experiences,” Sharon added , “Your Mommies had a lot of bad experiences when they were deployed, like being wounded or hurt by someone or seeing other people wounded or killed—not killed like on TV, but killed for real, like when your kitty was run over, Josie. ”

“Yeah,” Josie said. “I remember that. I still feel awful about it sometimes.”

“My Mommy has PTSD from Iraq,” Cassie said. “She was a nurse.”

“The bad guys blew up my Mommy,” Mark said. “She was in the hospital. She cried,” he said. He looked sad and scared.

“My Mommy has PTSD from something bad that happened to her. She was hurt by her buddies. They were supposed to have her back. She trusted them. That makes it harder,” Josie’s face grew sad.

“My Mommy cries over what she saw, but she won’t tell me what,” Cassie said.

“Even though they were deployed, it was like a war in my Mommy’s unit,” Josie said. “They hurt her and then they lied and were mean.”

“The bad guys blew up my Mommy. She was in the hospital. She lost her leg. She cried.” Mark said. He looked sad and scared.

“My Daddy hit my Mommy when they got back from Iraq,” Grace said. She sounded mad and sad at the same time. “I used to hide in the closet and cry. Sometimes he hit me. We can’t live with him now.”

“Your Daddy may have PTSD, too, Grace,” Sharon said. “He can also get help if he wants it.”

“Is that why my Mommy always talks about danger?” Cassie asked.

“Is that why she has nightmares? Why we can’t touch her when she’s asleep?”

Is that why my Mommy yells so much?” Grace said.

“Why she won’t talk to me? Why she won’t listen to me?”

“Is that why my Mommy doesn’t like me and Daddy anymore?” Mark asked.

“Why she doesn’t spend time with us? Why she is so bossy about everything?”

“Is that why she always worries about something happening to me?” Cassie said,

“Why she won’t let me do anything?”

“When you have a cold you have symptoms,” Sharon explained, “like a runny nose and a cough.

“Your Mommies have symptoms, too.

“Some of their PTSD symptoms are numb symptoms—Sometimes it seems like your Mommy doesn’t have caring feelings...like she’s not there. She loves you, but she has a hard time showing it.

“Your Mommies had to numb their feelings so they could do their jobs and to stand the fear and pain and the betrayal,” she nodded at Josie, “so now it’s hard for them to show that they care, but they do care.”

“Some of the other symptoms are remembering symptoms,” Sharon added.

“That is why your Mommy thinks about it so much. She can’t forget.

“That’s probably why she worries so much. And why she doesn’t want you to do things. She is remembering that a little mistake can make someone get hurt. She wants you to be safe. She wants to protect you from everything.

“Her nightmares are remembering symptoms, too.”

“Some of the symptoms of PTSD are like freak-out symptoms,” Sharon said. The kids nodded.

“Each of your Mommies got used to being real alert and ready for attacks even when she was sleeping. In a war, the enemy could attack at any time. Rockets and mortars can fall on a base. An IED, an Improvised Explosive Device bomb, can go off as a convoy goes by. A suicide bomber may blow himself up near you and hurt or kill the people around him or her. An Iraqi or Afghan that you think is your friend can betray you to the enemy. Any civilian walking past can turn on you—even women. Your Mommies are brave but they may be afraid of everyone when they come back.

“On top of that, Josie’s Mommy was not safe in her own unit so it is hard for her to trust anyone.”

“Your mommies also had to wake up fast and be ready to defend themselves or save lives at a moment’s notice. Many people with PTSD react before they are awake as if they still need to be ready for anything. That’s why your Mommy may say don’t touch her when she’s asleep. She might hit you thinking she was still in danger.”

“That is also why they get mad so fast,” Sharon said. “Sometimes when you are in danger, you have to get that mad to have the strength to save your life. You don’t have time to think it over—you just get mad.”

“When my Mommy gets mad real fast it sure can scare me!” Cassie said.

“Sometimes the symptoms combine, too—combine means add together—” Sharon said, “and people like your Mommy can be so numb, they don’t know they are getting angry until they are too angry to control it.”

“And sometimes they can be so numb, they don’t even know they are yelling!” The kids nodded and laughed.

“Yes,” Mark said. “Mommy says, ‘I wasn’t yelling,’ but she was!”

“The things that happened to your Mommy would make anyone angry,” Sharon said, “but many women don’t think it is nice to be angry, so they hide it and hide it till they blow up. Or they turn it inward and get really depressed.”

“My Mommy sometimes just lies on the bed and won’t get up. She says ‘Leave me alone, I’m too depressed.’” Cassie said. “She couldn’t save everyone. It makes her cry.”

“Remember how mad you were at whoever ran over your kitty, Cassie? Well, your Mommy is that mad, too. She’s angry about what happened, but the anger may end up getting splattered all over you.”

“When Mommy was deployed,” Sharon continued, “there may have been no time to sit down and cry. When you cried about the kitty, Cassie, it helped you feel better, remember? Nurses are supposed to stay professional and not cry so they can do their job and save lives. Many other women also never get the chance to cry. They have to take care of other people. Josie’s mom wasn’t allowed to cry when the men in her unit hurt her. Your moms were soldiers, professionals, so they were not supposed to cry. Grace’s mom had to try to keep Grace safe. Mark’s mom got to cry in the hospital, but she may need to cry more. People who don’t have time to cry can get stuck in being angry a lot of the time.”

“I used to think that if Dad and I were nice enough, Mommy wouldn’t be so unhappy,” Josie said, “if I were neat enough and never made a mess; if I were polite enough and never talked back with Dad or Mom; if I worked hard and got good grades.”

“I thought if I were real good, my daddy would stop hitting my Mom. Then we could live together again and be happy,” Grace said.

“I thought if I hit a lot of home runs at Little League; then Mommy would be happy again,” Mark said, “but she isn’t.”

“When I would try real hard to be good and Mommy was still upset, I would get real depressed,” Cassie said.

“My Dad says trying real hard might make Mommy seem better for a little while,” Mark said, “but nothing we do here and now can change what happened to her. We have to be patient while she heals.”

“That’s right,” Sharon said. “You’re not responsible and you can’t fix it. The hurts she suffered gave your Mommy the symptoms, and she has to work on them herself. There are groups that can help her when she is ready to help herself. That’s why she comes here— to get help.”

“Mommy will hurt a lot as she goes through therapy—that’s what they call the groups,” Sharon said. “She’ll hurt because she will have to remember the bad things. She’ll be angry and very, very sad. You’ll have to let her feel bad. You’re allowed to feel sad, too. But because you know you’re not responsible for how bad she feels, it will be easier for you to love her while she goes through it.”

“Now that I know Mommy has a disorder, I don’t have to be angry at her for having symptoms,” Grace said.

“I can love my Mommy, and we can begin to learn how to be happy again even though she still has problems,” Mark said.

“I always felt so different from my friends because it seems so easy for them to get along with their moms,” Cassie said. “I still am different, but it doesn’t seem like a bad difference now, because I understand more about my Mom.”

“You are children,” Sharon said, “and your job is just to be a kid.

—To get into messes

—to ask questions

—to need help from grownups

—to make mistakes and learn from them

—to be human

—and to grow up some with each passing year.”

“We hope our Mommies will get better, but until they do, we will be all right,”
said Josie.