

# PCL-5 PTSD Checklist (DSM-5)

Checklist · 33 items · 6 sections

The PCL-5 is the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5, a 20-item self-report measure published by the US Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD. You rate how much each symptom has bothered you in the past month on a 0 to 4 scale. This is a screening tool, not a diagnosis: only a qualified mental health professional can diagnose PTSD.

Open the editable, AI-powered version online:

<https://genechecklist.com/checklist/pcl-5-checklist>

## HOW TO USE THIS SCREENING TOOL

- Think about the most stressful experience in your life before starting
  - HIGH**
  - All 20 items refer back to that event.*
- Rate each symptom over the past month using 0-4: 0=Not at all, 1=A little bit, 2=Moderately, 3=Quite a bit, 4=Extremely
  - HIGH**
- Answer every item honestly, including uncomfortable ones
  - HIGH**
  - Skipped items make the total score unreliable.*
- This is a screening tool, not a diagnosis
  - HIGH**
  - Only a qualified clinician can diagnose PTSD.*
- Takes about 5-10 minutes to complete
- Keep your responses private or share only with a clinician you trust

## CLUSTER B - INTRUSION SYMPTOMS (ITEMS 1-5)

- 1. Repeated, disturbing, and unwanted memories of the stressful experience
- 2. Repeated, disturbing dreams of the stressful experience
- 3. Suddenly feeling or acting as if the stressful experience were actually happening again (as if you were actually back there reliving it)
- 4. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of the stressful experience
- 5. Having strong physical reactions when something reminded you of the stressful experience (heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating)

### **CLUSTER C - AVOIDANCE (ITEMS 6-7)**

- 6. Avoiding memories, thoughts, or feelings related to the stressful experience
- 7. Avoiding external reminders of the stressful experience (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations)

### **CLUSTER D - NEGATIVE COGNITIONS AND MOOD (ITEMS 8-14)**

- 8. Trouble remembering important parts of the stressful experience
- 9. Having strong negative beliefs about yourself, other people, or the world (e.g., 'I am bad,' 'something is seriously wrong with me,' 'no one can be trusted,' 'the world is completely dangerous')
- 10. Blaming yourself or someone else for the stressful experience or what happened after it
- 11. Having strong negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame
- 12. Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy
- 13. Feeling distant or cut off from other people
- 14. Trouble experiencing positive feelings (unable to feel happiness or have loving feelings for people close to you)

### **CLUSTER E - AROUSAL AND REACTIVITY (ITEMS 15-20)**

- 15. Irritable behavior, angry outbursts, or acting aggressively
- 16. Taking too many risks or doing things that could cause you harm
- 17. Being 'superalert' or watchful or on guard
- 18. Feeling jumpy or easily startled
- 19. Having difficulty concentrating
- 20. Trouble falling or staying asleep

### **SCORING AND NEXT STEPS**

- Sum all 20 item ratings for your total score (range: 0-80)

**HIGH**

- A total score of 33 or higher is the standard provisional PTSD cutoff

**HIGH**

*Warrants further clinical assessment. Cutoff varies by population (veterans, civilians, recent trauma).*

- DSM-5 symptom cluster rule of thumb: at least 1 item rated 2+ in Cluster B, 1 in C, 2 in D, 2 in E

- Bring your score and item-level answers to a primary care doctor, therapist, or psychiatrist

**HIGH**

*The gold-standard follow-up is the CAPS-5 structured interview.*

- Crisis: if you have thoughts of self-harm or suicide, contact 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988 in the US)

HIGH

- Veterans: press 1 after calling 988, or text 838255, to reach the Veterans Crisis Line

HIGH

- Re-screen every few weeks during treatment to track whether symptoms are improving