

## PTSD Checklist 5 (PCL-5)

### Instructions:

Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to stressful life experiences. How much you have been bothered by that problem IN THE LAST MONTH.

		Not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
1	Repeated, disturbing, and unwanted memories of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
2	Repeated, disturbing dreams of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
3	Suddenly feeling or acting as if the stressful experience were actually happening again (as if you were actually back there reliving it)?	0	1	2	3	4
4	Feeling very upset when something reminded you of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
5	Having strong physical reactions when something reminded you of the stressful experience (for example, heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating)?	0	1	2	3	4
6	Avoiding memories, thoughts, or feelings related to the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
7	Avoiding external reminders of the stressful experience (for example, people, places, conversations, activities, objects, or situations)?	0	1	2	3	4
8	Trouble remembering important parts of the stressful experience?	0	1	2	3	4
9	Having strong negative beliefs about yourself, other people, or the world (for example, having thoughts such as: I am bad, there is something seriously wrong with me, no one can be trusted, the world is completely dangerous)?	0	1	2	3	4
10	Blaming yourself or someone else for the stressful experience or what happened after it?	0	1	2	3	4
11	Having strong negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame?	0	1	2	3	4
12	Loss of interest in activities that you used to enjoy?	0	1	2	3	4
13	Feeling distant or cut off from other people?	0	1	2	3	4

		Not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
14	Trouble experiencing positive feelings (for example, being unable to feel happiness or have loving feelings for people close to you)?	0	1	2	3	4
15	Irritable behaviour, angry outbursts, or acting aggressively?	0	1	2	3	4
16	Taking too many risks or doing things that could cause you harm?	0	1	2	3	4
17	Being "superalert" or watchful or on guard?	0	1	2	3	4
18	Feeling jumpy or easily startled?	0	1	2	3	4
19	Having difficulty concentrating?	0	1	2	3	4
20	Trouble falling or staying asleep?	0	1	2	3	4

### Developer Reference:

Weathers, F.W., Litz, B.T., Keane, T.M., Palmieri, P.A., Marx, B.P., & Schnurr, P.P. (2013). The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5). Scale available from the National Center for PTSD at [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov).

## Scoring and Interpretation

Total scores can range from 0 to 80, with higher scores indicating greater PTSD symptom severity. Percentiles are also presented for the total score in comparison to both a normative and clinical (PTSD) sample. A normative percentile of 50 is indicative of an average score for someone who does not have PTSD, whereas a PTSD percentile of 50 is indicative of an average score for someone who is currently in care for PTSD.

There are four subscales which match the four symptom clusters for PTSD within DSM-5:

1. **Re-experiencing** (Criterion B, items 1-5, max score = 20)
2. **Avoidance** (Criterion C, items 6-7, max score = 8)
3. **Negative alterations in cognition and mood** (Criterion D, items 8-14, max score = 28)
4. **Hyper-arousal** (Criterion E, items 15-20, max score = 24)

In addition to a raw score being presented, **a mean score is also computed**, which is the subscale score divided by the number of items within that subscale. The average score can help determine elevated symptom clusters when comparing each of the four subscales. These scores range between 0 to 4, where higher scores represent higher severity. Consistent with the likert scale:

- **0 = Not at all**
- **1 = A little bit**
- **2 = Moderately**
- **3 = Quite a bit**
- **4 = Extremely**

Symptom descriptors are also presented for the total score and each of the subscale scores. These descriptors are determined by the distance from the normative mean:

- **Normal Range** = Average score less than or equal to 1.23
- **Mild** = Average score above 1.23 and less than or equal to 1.64
- **Moderate** = Average score above 1.64 and less than or equal to 2.455
- **Severe** = Average score above 2.455 and less than or equal to 3.265
- **Extremely Severe** = Average score above 3.265

Given the PCL-5 questions closely reassembled the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5-TR, a provisional PTSD diagnosis can be made based on the following rule. The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria requires at least: 1 Criterion B item (questions 1-5), 1 Criterion C item (questions 6-7), 2 Criterion D items (questions 8-14), and 2 Criterion E items (questions 15-20). A score of 2 (Moderately on the likert scale ) or higher is an endorsed symptom.

Notwithstanding the DSM related diagnostic criteria, **scores of 33 or above are considered to be of clinical significance**, and can serve as an alternative threshold for identifying significant PTSD symptoms that interfere with daily functioning (Bovin et al., 2016; Krüger-Gottschalk et al., 2017; Rosendahl et al., 2019).