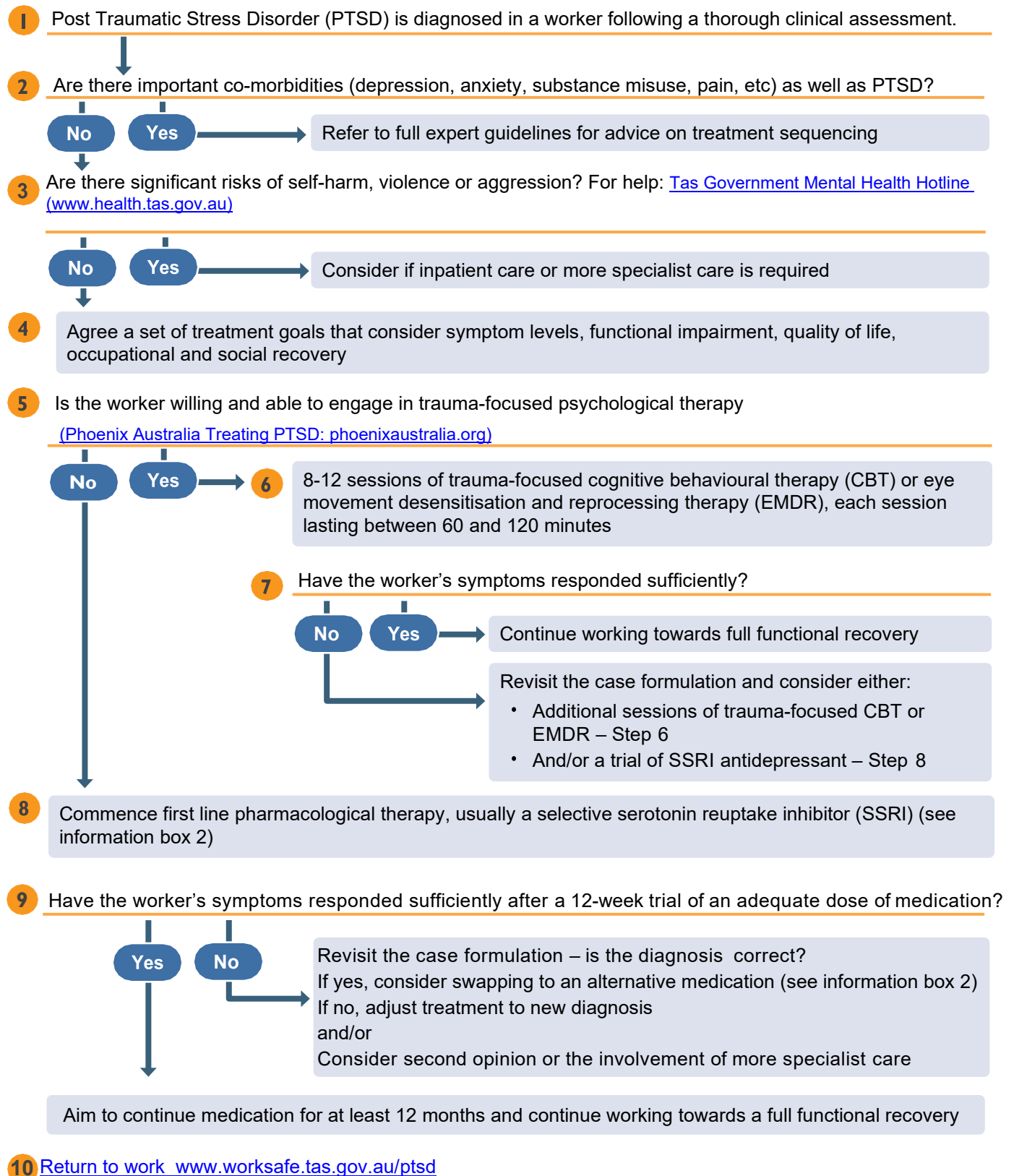


Suggested steps for the treatment of PTSD in workers





Return to work:

Return to work is about helping workers get back to work or stay at work while they recover from work-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Occupational recovery should be considered from the very beginning of treatment. Workers don't have to be 100 per cent well to be at work, and being at work can help in their recovery from PTSD. Many factors play into this process, from individual, organisational and system levels all interacting to influence a worker's recovery or absence from work.

There should be an expectation that most workers living with PTSD can gain benefits from appropriate treatment. While a period away from work duties may be required, clinicians should consider the possibility of adjusted duties and partial return to work as ways of promoting recovery and reducing the risk of long-term sickness absence. Typically, waiting for recovery delays recovery. Staying away from work may lead to depression, isolation, and poorer health. Employer-supported, early return to work helps recovery, prevents de-conditioning, and helps provide workers with appropriate social contacts and support mechanisms.

All workers who are absent from work due to PTSD should be offered work-focused interventions, such as work-focused exposure therapy, in addition to standard symptom-focused treatment. Depending on the nature of the trauma exposure and PTSD, some workers may need to resume on a period of alternate duties because direct re-exposure to particular events may be overly distressing.

A positive return to work experience involves all systems working well together. Providing early support to workers suffering from work-related PTSD is critical to enable their recovery and return to work. The longer someone is away from work, the less likely they are to return to work. While a period away from usual duties may be necessary, adjusted duties should be considered along with partial return to work as a way of promoting recovery and reducing the risk of long-term sickness absence. Good work is a therapeutic intervention, it is part of treatment. Paid employment not only provides financial security but can also create daily structure, a sense of worth and regular supportive social engagement.

So, when a worker living with PTSD returns to work, their return to work plan should include check-ins with their supervisor or manager to see how the adjustment to their work role is going. Contact should continue with treating health professionals for symptom monitoring and support for maintaining their recovery. It should be agreed how their symptom levels will be monitored and what type of symptom recurrence should prompt a re-assessment.

Workplace rehabilitation providers role:

Workplace rehabilitation providers are integral in supporting workers on return to work plans and identifying barriers and risk factors which may impact a successful return to work by working out solutions, often preventatively.

Additional Resources

- RACP: [Health Benefits of Good Work](https://www.racp.edu.au), www.racp.edu.au
- [Health Direct: PTSD](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au), www.healthdirect.gov.au
- [RACGP: Accredited PTSD Training Program](https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/ptsd), www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/ptsd
- FearLess PTSD Australia New Zealand
 - [Let's talk PTSD: The lived experience perspective on early intervention and management strategies](#)
 - [First responders – the next chapter](#)
 - [Beyond Trauma with Lisa Westgate and Anneke Weemaes](#)
 - [Moving beyond PTSD: A webinar about hope.](#)

This information has been adapted from the Black Dog Institute suggested steps for the treatment of PTSD in emergency workers and is considered best practice in the treatment of PTSD sufferers in workers:

Harvey, S., Bryant, R. and Forbes, D. (2018) PTSD expert guidelines: A clinicians summary, EML. Available at: <https://www.eml.com.au/resources/ptsd-expert-guidelines-a-clinicians-summary/> (Accessed: 15 March 2024).