

Trauma checklist (PCL-C)

(adapted from Weathers, Litz, Huska, & Keane, 1994)

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to traumatic and stressful life experiences. Please read each one carefully and tick the box to indicate how much you have been bothered by that problem in **the past month**.

No	Response	Not at all (1)	A little bit (2)	Moderately (3)	Quite a bit (4)	Extremely (5)
1	Repeated <i>disturbing memories, thoughts, or images</i> of a stressful experience from the past?					
2	Repeated <i>disturbing dreams</i> of a stressful experience from the past?					
3	Suddenly <i>acting or feeling</i> as if a stressful experience <i>were happening</i> again (as if you were reliving it)?					
4	Feeling very <i>upset</i> when <i>something reminded you</i> of a stressful experience from the past?					
5	Having <i>physical reactions</i> (e.g. heart pounding, trouble breathing, or sweating) when <i>something reminded you</i> of a stressful experience from the past?					
6	Avoid <i>thinking about</i> or <i>talking about</i> a stressful experience from the past, or avoid <i>having feelings</i> related to it?					
7	Avoid <i>activities or situations</i> because they remind you of a stressful experience from the past?					
8	Trouble <i>remembering important parts</i> of a stressful experience from the past?					

No	Response	Not at all (1)	A little bit (2)	Moderately (3)	Quite a bit (4)	Extremely (5)
9	Loss of <i>interest in things that you used to enjoy</i> ?					
10	Feeling <i>distant or cut off</i> from other people?					
11	Feeling <i>emotionally numb</i> , or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?					
12	Feeling as if your <i>future</i> will somehow be cut short?					
13	Trouble <i>falling or staying asleep</i> ?					
14	Feeling <i>irritable</i> or having <i>angry outbursts</i> ?					
15	Having <i>difficulty concentrating</i> ?					
16	Being ' <i>super alert</i> ' or watchful/on guard?					
17	Feeling <i>jumpy</i> or easily startled?					

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Trauma/PTSD checklist (PCL-C)

The PCL-C asks about symptoms in relation to generic stressful experiences, and can be used with any population. This version simplifies assessment based on multiple traumas, because symptom endorsements are not attributed to a specific event. In many circumstances, it is advisable to also assess traumatic event exposure to ensure that a respondent has experienced at least one event that meets DSM-IV Criterion A.

Administration and Scoring

The PCL is a self-report instrument that can be read by respondents themselves, or read to them either in person or over the phone. It can be completed in approximately 5-10 minutes.

The PCL-C can be scored in several ways:

1) Treat response categories 3–5 (*Moderately* or above) as symptomatic and responses 1–2 (below *Moderately*) as non-symptomatic, then use the following DSM criteria for a diagnosis:

- Symptomatic response to at least 1 “B” item (Questions 1–5),
- Symptomatic response to at least 3 “C” items (Questions 6–12), and
- Symptomatic response to at least 2 “D” items (Questions 13–17)

2) Add up the items to create total severity score. A **Total symptom severity score** (range 17-85) can be obtained by summing the scores from each of the 17 items that have response options ranging from 1 ‘Not at all’ to 5 ‘Extremely’.

The gold standard for diagnosing PTSD is a structured clinical interview such as the clinician administered PTSD scale (CAPS). When necessary, the PCL can be scored to provide a presumptive diagnosis. This has been done in three ways:

1. Determine whether an individual meets DSM-IV symptom criteria, as defined by at least 1 criterion B item (questions 1-5), 3 criterion C items (questions 6-12) and at least 2 criterion D items (questions 13-17). Symptoms rated as ‘Moderately’ or above (responses 3 through 5 on individual items) are counted as present.
2. Determine whether the total severity score exceeds a given normative threshold (see table below).
3. Combine methods (1) and (2) to ensure that an individual meets both the symptom pattern and severity threshold.

Choosing a cut-off score

Factors to be considered when choosing a PCL cut-off score include:

- **The goal of the assessment:** A lower cut-off score is considered when screening for PTSD, or when it is desirable to maximise detection of possible cases. A higher cut-off score is considered when informing diagnosis or to minimise false positives.
- **The prevalence of PTSD in the target setting:** Generally, the lower the prevalence of PTSD in a given setting, the lower the optimal cut-off score. In settings with expected high rates of PTSD, such as specialty mental health clinics, consider a

higher cut-off score. In settings with expected low rates of PTSD such as primary care clinics, or in circumstances in which patients are reluctant to disclose mental health problems, consider a lower cut-off score.

Below are suggested cut-off score ranges based on prevalence and setting characteristics. Consider scores on the low end of the range if the goal is to screen for PTSD. Consider scores on the high end of the range if the goal is to aid in diagnosis of PTSD.

Suggested PCL cut-off scores

Estimated prevalence of PTSD	Suggested PCL cut-off score
Below 15% (Primary care)	30-35
16-39% (DVA primary care, specialised medical clinics)	36-44
Above 40% (Specialist mental health clinics)	45-50

NB: these recommendations are general and approximate, and are not intended to be used for legal or policy purposes. Research is needed to establish optimal cut-off scores for a specific population.

Measuring change

Good clinical practice often involves monitoring client progress. Evidence suggests that a 5-10 point change is reliable (i.e. not due to chance) and a 10-20 point change is clinically meaningful (Monson et al., 2008). Therefore, we recommend using 5 points as a minimum threshold for determining whether an individual has responded to treatment and 10 points as a minimum threshold for determining whether the improvement is clinically meaningful.

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/assessments/ptsd-checklist.asp>