
Why PTSD Should Be renamed to PTSR ?

By Catherine Delayny

Dirk J. Lambert, a seasoned clinical trauma specialist, psychotherapist, and the creator of RETR (Rapid Emotional Trauma Release), has spent over two decades helping people recover from some of the most devastating psychological wounds imaginable. From his work with war veterans in Vietnam, survivors of sexual abuse, and first responders in disaster zones, to his ongoing programs in Northern Thailand and at the Myanmar border, Dirk has seen firsthand the vast emotional spectrum of trauma.

And one thing he's certain of: we need to stop calling it a "disorder."

For years, the label Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been the standard diagnosis for those struggling with the psychological aftershocks of trauma. But Dirk argues that this terminology is not only outdated — it's harmful.

Trauma Is Not a Disorder

Dirk prefers the term Post-Traumatic Stress Response (PTSR). Why? Because what we call "symptoms" — hypervigilance, flashbacks, avoidance, emotional numbness — are normal, adaptive reactions to events that were completely abnormal.

"Your brain and nervous system are doing exactly what they were designed to do when faced with threat," Dirk explains. "These responses are survival mechanisms. Calling them a disorder immediately pathologizes the person, when in fact their system is reacting appropriately to extreme stress."

According to Dirk, the term "disorder" implies brokenness or dysfunction, and often carries shame. It frames trauma as a mental illness, rather than what it truly is: a nervous system stuck in survival mode.

The Impact of Language

Dirk is not alone in challenging the PTSD label. A growing number of trauma experts around the world are calling for a shift in how we define and name trauma responses. "When we change the language, we change the narrative," Dirk says. "And when we change the narrative, we begin to heal."

By calling it PTSR, clients are more likely to understand that their reactions are not signs of weakness or mental illness, but the natural residue of overwhelming experiences. This reframe can reduce internalized stigma, and often helps people feel empowered to begin the healing process without shame.

From Survival to Integration

At his trauma recovery center, New Paradigm in Chiang Mai, Dirk and his team use this language shift as a core part of treatment. Clients are

encouraged to see their symptoms not as permanent flaws, but as evidence of resilience. His methodology, RETR, is built on the idea of working with the nervous system, not against it — using bilateral stimulation, EMDR-based tools, and body-centered therapies to gently release the trauma held in the body.

"We're not treating a disorder," Dirk says. "We're guiding a person out of survival mode and back into wholeness."

A Call for Change

Dirk J. Lambert is calling on mental health professionals, educators, and trauma-informed organizations to reconsider the language we use. He's seen the difference this simple change makes in people's lives, especially in communities already burdened by stigma and shame.

"Trauma is not a defect," he says. "It's a story that hasn't been finished yet. And no one should be made to feel like they are disordered just for surviving."

Perhaps it's time we all started saying PTSR — and seeing trauma for what it truly is: a human response to human pain.
