

Care Tips for Survivors of a Traumatic Event: What to Expect in Your Personal, Family, Work, and Financial Life

Things to Remember When Trying to Understand Traumatic Events

- No one who sees a disaster/traumatic event is untouched by it.
- It is normal to feel anxious about you and your family's safety.
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are all *normal* reactions to an *abnormal* event.
- Acknowledging your feelings can help you recover.
- Focusing on your strengths and abilities will help you to heal.
- Accepting help from community resources and your EAP is healthy.
- Recognize that we each have different needs and different ways of coping.
- It is common to want to find someone to blame and strike out at; however, nothing good is accomplished by angry/vengeful thoughts or actions.

Signs that Adults Need Stress Management Assistance

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Easily frustrated
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Limited attention span or difficulty concentrating
- Poor work performance
- Headaches/stomach problems or colds and flu-like symptoms
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Disorientation or confusion
- Reluctance to leave home
- Depression, sadness and feelings of hopelessness
- Mood-swings
- Crying easily
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone

Ways to Ease the Stress

- Talk with someone about your feelings—anger, sorrow, and other emotions-- even though it may be difficult.
- Don't blame yourself for the event or be frustrated because you feel that you can't change things.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by staying active in your daily life patterns or by adjusting them. This healthy outlook will help you and your family. (i.e. healthy diet, rest, exercise, etc.)
- Maintain a *normal* household and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities until things settle down.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and use of symbols as a way to express feelings.
- Use existing supports groups of family, friends, and church.

* When to Seek Help: If self help strategies are not helping or you find that you are using drugs/alcohol in order to cope, you may wish to seek outside or professional assistance with your stress symptoms.

Source: http://www.soph.uab.edu/scphp/psychological_first_aid

THINGS TO TRY

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time – keep busy.
- You're normal and having a normal reaction – don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people – talking can be a healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out – people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you are not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals – even if you don't feel like it.

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, and taking care of children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are “lucky it wasn't worse” – traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

For Additional Information or to Access Benefits Call:



American Behavioral ®

800-925-5EAP (5327)

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CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEETS

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident. Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite *normal*, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by him or herself.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

Physical Cognitive Emotional Behavioral

chills
thirst
fatigue
nausea
fainting
twitching
vomiting
dizziness
weakness
chest pain
headaches
elevated BP
rapid heart rate
muscle tremors
shock symptoms
grinding teeth
visual difficulties
profuse sweating
difficulty breathing

confusion
nightmares
uncertainty
hypervigilance
suspiciousness
intrusive images
blaming someone
poor problem solving
poor abstract thinking
poor attention/decisions
poor concentration/memory
disorientation of time, place or person
emotional outbursts
difficulty identifying objects or people
loss of emotional control
heightened or lowered alertness
increased or decreased awareness of surroundings

fear
guilt
grief
panic
denial
anxiety
agitation
irritability
depression
intense anger
apprehension
emotional shock
feeling overwhelmed
increased alcohol consumption
inappropriate emotional response
change in usual communications, etc.

withdrawal
antisocial acts
inability to rest
intensified pacing
erratic movements
change in social activity
change in speech patterns
loss or increase of appetite
hyperalert to environment

Source: *International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc. 1998*

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How Managers Can Help Employees That Have Experienced a Traumatic Incident

- **Listen** - let them simply talk.
- **Validate** - let them know that what they are experiencing is normal. They need to know that they are not crazy or weak.
- **Encourage them to seek help** - remind them that professional help is available and that it is okay to ask for help. Provide *American Behavioral* Contact information.
- **Don't judge** - don't be critical of their actions or emotions. Most people need time to start feeling and acting "normal" again.
- **Do only what you can - know your own limits.** Provide as much support as you can but don't try to be their counselor.
- **Don't provide platitudes** - don't try to make them feel better by making cliché statements such as, "everything happens for a reason".
- **Don't encourage negative coping** - don't tolerate self destructive coping methods such as drinking or drug use.
- **Respect what they are going through** - remember that everyone reacts in their own way and needs to find their own path of recovery.
- **Ask what they need** - if you are not sure how to help, don't hesitate to ask what you can do.
- **Help them find their strengths** - remind them of the strengths that you see in them.



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