

Coping with a Trauma

**Information leaflet for
Adults**

Children's Service: Educational Psychology Service

This information will help you know how adults and children have reacted when faced with a trauma. There is no right or wrong way to feel. It will show you how you can help normal healing to occur and avoid some pitfalls.

Normal Feelings & Emotions Experienced

Shock and Disbelief - The event seems to be unreal, like a film or a dream.

Numbness - Your emotions can be cut off.

Fear - Of death, of injury or harm to yourself or those you love. Of being left alone, or having to leave loved ones. Of 'breaking down' or 'losing control'. Of a similar event happening again.



Helplessness - Crisis may reveal human frailty, as well as strength.

Guilt - Regret for things not done.

Shame - For not having felt and reacted as you would have wished. For having been helpless, 'emotional' and needing others

DO allow your children to return to school and keep up with their activities as soon as they are ready.

DO express your needs clearly and honestly to family, friends and officials.

DO drive more carefully.

DO keep up usual safety standards.

DO watch your diet and physical healthy.

DO be more careful with coffee, cigarette, alcohol and drug intake.

Seek Professional Help If

- ◆ Your emotions or physical symptoms are too intense or persistent
- ◆ You feel too numb, cut off or you have to keep active in order not to feel
- ◆ You continue to have nightmares, poor sleep or 'flashbacks'
- ◆ Your family, social or work relationships suffer
- ◆ You experience loss of memory and concentration
- ◆ Your performance suffers at school, work or at home
- ◆ You have accidents or illness
- ◆ You increase smoking, drinking or drug taking
- ◆ You have no-one to talk to about your experience
- ◆ You have lost faith in yourself or the world.

Seeking Support Is A Positive Step

Deep reaching experiences may lead you to have a sense of being different from before. The inside as well as the outside changes. In time you may develop deeper understanding of yourself and what it means to be a human being.

Physical Reactions

Your body as well as your mind may be affected immediately or even many months later.

Common Reactions Include

Tiredness, shakes, dizziness, palpitations.

Difficulty in breathing, choking in the throat and chest pains.

Nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting.

Infections frequently occur when you are run down. Alcohol, coffee and drug intake may increase due to extra tension. Accidents are more frequent after severe stress.

Family and Social Relationships

You may form new friendships and groups. However strains in relationships may also appear. As well as the good feelings of giving and receiving there may be conflict, anger and jealousy. You may feel that too little or the wrong things are offered, or that you cannot give as much as expected. Changes may occur in the way families, friends and the community relate to and need each other.

Children

Children also experience emotional and physical responses in crises. Their imaginings and nightmares add to fear of the event. children express themselves through talking, play and drawing. Their distress may be shown by returning to earlier ways of behaving such as clinging.

Sometimes these behaviours may be a burden on already stressed parents and teachers. Yet children need the closeness and comfort of their families and familiar adults. They need to be given honest explanations. They need reassurance about their own safety and that of their family.



Making the Events and the Feelings about them Easier to Bear

Doing Things

To be active and useful may provide relief and a sense of control. However, overactivity may be harmful if it stops you feeling too much.

Talking

Talking about your experiences and how you feel about them will help. It also helps to listen to others who have been affected.

Support

Be open to receiving support and comfort and give them when you can.

Privacy

Make time and space for yourself to be alone with your own thoughts and feelings.

Exercise, Rest and Recreation

Are important to maintain your physical and mental health



Reaction may be more Intense and Troubling for some People

Especially

- ◆ Where deaths were multiple, sudden or violent.
- ◆ When a child or young person died.
- ◆ When the body was not found.
- ◆ When the relationship with the person was difficult.
- ◆ When the crises is on top of other painful experiences.
- ◆ When you are thrown back to the pain of a previous loss.



Some Do's and Don'ts

DON'T bottle up feelings.

DON'T avoid talking and thinking about what has happened.

DO allow yourself time to talk, grieve, be angry, cry and laugh according to your needs.

DO allow children to share in your grief and encourage them to express their own.

DO allow yourself time to be with people who care about you.

DO spend time alone when you need it.

DO recognise that everyone expresses things in their own way. Men generally find it harder to express emotion and weep. Children may need encouragement to express themselves.

DO take time out to sleep, rest, enjoy and do routine things when possible.

Sadness

For deaths, injuries and losses of every kind including past losses.

Anger and Frustration

At what happened, whoever caused it or allowed it to happen.

At the injustice and senselessness of it all.

Let Down

Disappointments, which alternate with....

Hope

For the future, for better times.

Remembering

The events and feelings may return to you in your thoughts, daydreams, images, flashbacks, night dreams and nightmares. You may remember past crises. These are normal ways to process the event and make meaning of it. suppressions, pushing things out of your mind, may lead to loss of memory, concentration and fuzziness of the mind.

Do remember that all responses are **normal** to an **abnormal** situation.



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