

COPING WITH TRAUMA

What is trauma?

A traumatic event is one which is outside the normal field of human experiences, such as involvement in a major incident, e.g. a serious road traffic accident, an armed robbery or serious assault.

Anyone can be affected by trauma

Such situations affect almost everyone, whoever you are and whatever your training.

TO REACT TO AN ABNORMAL SITUATION **IS** NORMAL

How do people react?

Any incident which is sudden and unexpected can result in emotional as well as physical reactions.

The reactions may be widespread and can last for some time. Like dropping a pebble in a pool of water, the ripples continue long after the original splash. Intensity, variety and frequency of the reactions vary with each individual.

BUT YOU CAN BE NORMAL AND NOT REACT.

Physical reactions

Some common physical reactions are:-

1. Tiredness.
2. Dizziness, palpitations or shaking.
3. Difficulty in breathing and tightness in the chest.
4. Nausea or diarrhoea.
5. Muscular tension leading to such things as headaches or backache.
6. Digestive problems e.g. loss of appetite.
7. Sexual problems.

Psychological reactions

Some common psychological reactions are:

1. *Shutting out the outside world*
e.g. it seems impossible to enjoy things which were pleasurable prior to the incident
2. Suffering intrusive thoughts
e.g. thoughts about the incident recur whilst you are trying to concentrate on something else
3. Having flashbacks
4. An inability to concentrate and remember everyday things
5. Experiencing depressive symptoms such as fatigue, restlessness, loss of appetite and withdrawal
6. Moodiness, irritability, or aggressive outbursts where there is little or no provocation
7. Experiencing feelings of anxiety or fear for no apparent reason
8. Feeling guilty at surviving whilst others did not.
9. Sleep disturbance, dreams and nightmares.

Some Do's and Don'ts which may help you to cope

Do	Don't
Do talk about the incident. Use every opportunity to review the situation.	Don't bottle up your emotions: express your feelings and let your family share your grief. Don't forget they are suffering too.
Do take time to sleep, rest and be with your family.	Don't let your embarrassment stop you giving others the chance to speak.
Do be honest about your needs and feelings to family, friends and employers.	Don't expect the memories to go away. They will be with you for a long time to come
Do try to lead as normal a life as possible.	Don't make rash decisions, e.g. resigning your job, moving away, etc. Give yourself time to come to terms with your feelings before acting.
Do be more careful while driving or working around the home. You are more likely to have an accident after a stressful incident.	Don't keep the trauma from your children without considering how they would react if instead they heard from other relatives, or their friends at school.

We hope this guidance assists you in understanding your reaction to the recent traumatic events.

Remember.... These are the normal reactions of normal people to events which are unusual or abnormal.

Help & support

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5th Floor Crawford House
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Occupational Health Services

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