

Coping with a Traumatic Event

Experiencing a traumatic event or situation may bring about a roller coaster of emotions; often individuals are not prepared for the strong emotional response they may experience. Please know, it is very common, in fact quite *normal*, for individuals to experience “emotional aftershocks” following a traumatic event. These “aftershocks” may include:

- Uncertainty/fear
- Anxious/overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional outbursts
- Hyper alert to environment
- Restlessness/agitation
- Appetite changes
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- Nausea/stomach issues

These responses are very natural reactions to a stressful, traumatic event. The full force of emotional reactions may come a few days or even weeks after the incident occurs. Some individuals may experience exhaustion, grief, desperation and depression. It is important to pay attention to your unique response and reactions. If you are in need of support, please reach out to a mental health professional.

Helping Yourself and Others

- Talk about the incident and how it impacts you personally to someone you trust when you are ready.
- Listen. When others talk about their experiences and feelings, their emotional load seems lighter to bear. One of the best ways you can help is to just listen. You don’t have to come up with solutions or answers. It’s okay if someone breaks down and cries.
- Show by words and actions that you care. Go ahead and act. Don't be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. Small, kind deeds and sincere expressions of affection or admiration also will mean a lot.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are not uncommon - don’t try to fight them - they should decrease over time and become less painful.
- You may not feel hungry, however, maintaining a healthy level of nutrition is important for physical and emotional strength. Even small snacks throughout the day will be helpful.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. This may sound silly, but we often forget to hydrate when we are stressed or feeling anxious. Dehydration can make those feelings worse.
- Exercise - Many people find that physical exercise helps them to better cope and relax.
- Be understanding that this incident may trigger other emotions and reactions from one’s past.
- Your perceptions and reactions to an incident may be very different than others based upon past experiences, beliefs, and coping skills.
- Try to maintain your daily routines and structure your time. You will likely find that maintaining your routine will help gain back a sense of control and order in your life.