

Coping After a Traumatic Event

After a traumatic experience, many people feel sad, angry, helpless, anxious and even numb. It is not unusual to have trouble sleeping, eating and concentrating, and to exhibit other symptoms of significant stress. These are all normal reactions to a traumatic event. There are, however, actions you can take to help the healing process:

GIVE YOURSELF TIME. It takes time—weeks or months—to accept what has happened. Give yourself that time.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS. It can help to spend time with others who have been through the same or similar experiences as you. Attending funerals or memorial services may help.

TAKE SOME TIME FOR YOURSELF. It's normal to want to be alone or to be just with those closest to you.

TALK IT OVER. Don't worry if you cry when you talk; it's natural and usually helpful.

CREATE HEALTHY HABITS. Even if you don't feel much like eating, try to have regular meals and to eat a balanced diet. Some exercise can help, but start gently.

RESTORE SOME NORMALCY. Sometimes you will want to be around other people, but not necessarily to talk about what has happened. This can also be part of the healing process. Take things at a pace that you feel comfortable with.

BE CAREFUL. People are more likely to have accidents after a trauma due to lack of concentration and focus. Be extra careful around your home, work and when driving.

Sometimes the stress can be too much to handle alone. Seek help if you:

- have no one to share your feelings with
- feel overwhelmed by sadness or anxiety
- have nightmares or cannot sleep
- don't want to be around people
- find that your work is suffering
- hear others suggesting you seek help
- become more accident prone
- are drinking, smoking or using drugs to cope with your feelings
- notice your symptoms last more than six weeks without any relief