



Coping With Trauma

What Is a Traumatic Event?

Most people have been through a stressful event in life. When the event, or series of events, causes a lot of stress it is called a traumatic event. Traumatic events are marked by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury, or the threat of serious injury or death. Traumatic events affect survivors, rescue workers, and the friends and relatives of victims who have been involved. They may also have an impact on people who have seen the event either firsthand or on television.

What Are The Signs of Trauma?

It is common for people to continue to have distressing thoughts, images, and feelings for some days, or even weeks, following the trauma. These reactions are common, and are a sign that the body is recovering from a severe stress.

The most commonly reported reactions to trauma are:

- Anxiety or fear of danger to self or loved ones, being alone, being in other frightening situations, having a similar event happen again.
- Avoidance of situations or thoughts that remind you of the traumatic event.
- Being easily startled by loud noises or sudden movements.
- Flashbacks where images of the traumatic event come into your mind suddenly for no apparent reason, or where you mentally re-experience the event.
- Physical symptoms such as tense muscles, trembling or shaking, nausea, headaches, sweating, and tiredness.
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including loss of appetite or interest in sex.
- Sadness, feelings of loss, or aloneness.
- Sleep problems, including getting to sleep, waking in the middle of the night, dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event.
- Problems with thinking, concentration, or remembering things (especially aspects of the traumatic event).
- Preoccupation with thinking about the trauma.
- Guilt and self-doubt for not having acted in some other way during the trauma, or for being better off than others, or feeling responsible for another person's death or injury.
- Anger or irritability at what has happened, at the senselessness of it all, at what caused the event to happen, often asking "Why me?".

Not everyone will experience all of these reactions, or experience these reactions to the same extent. There may also be other reactions to add to the list. However, in most cases, these symptoms will disappear after a relatively short period of time.

Coping with Symptoms of Trauma

Immediately After the Event

- Make sure you are with people. Do not go home to an empty house – ask a friend or relative to stay with you.
- Talk about the incident with others. Talking will help you get over the reactions.
- Remind yourself that the event is over and that you are now safe.
- If possible, get some physical exercise. This will help to burn off some of your tension and anxiety.
- Avoid alcohol, sedatives, or sleeping pills (they will only dull the experience and not allow you to deal with your feelings properly).
- Restrict stimulants (such as tea, coffee, chocolate, cola, or cigarettes) because you do not want to make your body even more agitated than it already is.
- Try to eat something, even if you do not feel like eating.
- If you cannot sleep, do not lie in bed, tossing and turning – get up and do something until you feel tired.

How to Handle the Next Few Days

- Remind yourself that your reactions are a normal result of trauma and will pass in time.
- Try to get back into your normal routine as soon as possible. You may need to gradually introduce yourself to tasks that seem difficult.
- If you feel uncomfortable, scared, or anxious, take some long, slow breaths and remind yourself that you are safe, and that the trauma is over.
- Make sure that you are doing things that are relaxing and enjoyable – be kind to yourself.
- Continue to talk to your family, friends, and colleagues about the trauma. This will help you to get over your feelings. Even if you feel a bit distant from other people, do not reject their support. Do not be afraid of your feelings.
- Work on your general stress levels by ensuring that you have adequate sleep, a good diet and regular exercise. Practice relaxation to help reduce nervous tension.
- Drive more carefully, and be more careful around the home and with machinery. Accidents are more common after severe stress.
- Allow yourself time to deal with the memories. You will need commitment and patience. There may be some aspects of the experience that will be difficult to forget.

If your reaction continues to seriously disrupt your life, please talk to a mental health professional.



24/7 Crisis Services

*A proud provider of Colorado Crisis Services
844.493.TALK (8255)*

Canon City:
719.275.2351

Salida:
719.539.6502

Buena Vista:
719.539.6502
(Salida)

Westcliffe:
719.783.0566

Leadville:
719.486.0985

