

Dealing with the Stress of Traumatic Events

Strategies for Those Affected

Many people experience extreme reactions to a traumatic event. At this time, intense feelings may be stimulated. They can be associated with current events, past memories and associations, as well as thoughts of the future. Individuals may experience a range of reactions either due to internal conflicts and confusions, or due to this event or such events in general. This can create stress. Below are some of the stresses you might experience and some ideas on how to manage stress.

STRESS REACTIONS

Over the next several weeks you may experience normal reactions, which may include:

Physical Reactions

- Fatigue
 - Nightmares
 - Hyperactivity
 - Impulsive behavior
 - Health problems: changes in appetite, tense muscles, and digestive problems.
- Sleep disturbances
 - Self medication-substance abuse
 - Startle reactions
 - Headaches

Cognitive Reactions

- Difficult concentrating
 - Memory disturbance
 - Difficulty making decisions
 - Intrusive thoughts
- Difficult problem solving
 - Inability to attach importance to anything else
 - Flashbacks

Emotional Reactions

- Fear
 - Emotional numbing
 - Lack of emotion
 - Depression
 - Loss of control
- Guilt
 - Anger
 - Anxiety
 - Helplessness
 - Feeling pressured

Those are normal reactions and, although painful, is part of the healing process. There is not a lot anyone can do to make you not experience these uncomfortable feelings, but there are things you can do to feel more whole.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. If you experience personal trauma stress during this period, you can counter the shock by:

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS, periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Deliberately limit the time you watch T.V. news of the event.
- Structure your time – keep busy.
- You are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy.
- Talk to people – talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol. You don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out – people do care.

- Keep your life as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal. Write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- The Nutrition Almanac recommends supplementing your diet with Vitamin C, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B6, Calcium, and Magnesium.
- Don't make any big life changes.

2. Managing your everyday stress is very important in this time of excess stress overall.

- Take care of yourself – Sleep and eat regularly, exercise, limit caffeine and alcohol consumption; make sure to play in some way everyday.
- Find some people who will support you – talk about things that affect you, listen to your friends, laugh with people, and ask for help when you need it.
- Slow down internally – Notice what you say to yourself, do one thing at a time, concentrate on the present (e.g., savor your food, notice the sun, really listen), and breathe.
- Alter your daily schedule – Start each day in a leisurely manner rather than rushing. Find a time of day to totally relax.
- Assess your work/study habits – Shed events, do rather than more in a period of time, prioritize activities, schedule yourself including time for relaxing yourself, prepare more for tests and practice relaxation just before exams.

3. Making daily decisions will give you a feeling of control over your life, which counteracts feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

- Decide what to wear each day.
- Decide what to eat and when to eat.
- Decide how to spend your time.
- Answer even simple questions with a decision rather than “I don't care” or “whatever you want”.