

COPING WITH A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

What is trauma?

Trauma is the emotional reaction to an uncommon, frightening or even life-threatening event. Although traumatic events affect people differently, there are some common reactions that you may experience. These may begin immediately or within a few days or weeks. Remember that reactions are normal and their intensity and duration varies. They may include: insomnia, fatigue, hyperactivity, pain, headaches, heart palpitations, dizzy spells, changes in appetite or emotional reactions.

What are common emotional reactions to a traumatic event?

Sometimes people experience flashbacks or relive the experience in some capacity. You may be more sensitive and be startled easily. Feeling sad, irritable, angry, anxious, helpless and vulnerable are also common.

Your personal and work productivity may also be affected in that it may be difficult to concentrate; you may have memory lapses and the incidence of errors may increase. Tensions at both work and home may also increase.

Unresolved or pre-existing emotional problems or painful memories of previous losses may resurface.

How long do these reactions last?

How long they last vary because each person is unique. There are many reasons for individual differences including personality, health, coping styles, culture, family and social supports, and your own unique life experiences. Sometimes, reactions don't appear right away and may come weeks or months after the traumatic event. However, any reactions you experience will usually diminish over time. When they are not diminishing, that is when you may need to seek further assistance.

Tips for Coping with Trauma

- You are not responsible for the traumatic event; therefore, do not be frustrated by your inability to be of direct help in the situation.
- Don't judge or measure your reactions by those of other people. Each person is unique and experiences trauma differently than others.
- Talk with others. Share your feelings such as anger, fright, sorrow and other emotions. Though it may be difficult, it will be helpful.
- Use existing support groups of family, friends and spiritual/religious resources. Avoid isolation.
- Maintain normal household and daily routines as much as possible; limit demanding responsibilities on yourself and your family.
- Don't make any major decisions or life changes.
- Allow yourself to grieve since a trauma often results in a loss.
- Focus and reflect on your strengths and abilities to help you heal. Healing is a natural process.
- If you follow a religious faith, this can be a time for prayer and quiet meditation. Seek out your faith mentors and advisors.
- Exercise if you are able and eat a balanced diet. Avoid alcohol and the use of other mood-altering drugs to address any discomfort. Get plenty of rest.
- Learn to be sensitive and flexible with your needs and lifestyle.
- Seek professional help if unpleasant feelings persist, intensify, or seem severe.



COPING WITH A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

What is PTSD?

When feelings of fear and discomfort continue for weeks or months after the trauma is over, and they affect your life and the people around you, you may have a clinical condition called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Some of the signs of PTSD include:

- Recurrent bad dreams
- Flashbacks of the traumatic event
- Frightening thoughts you are unable to control
- Feeling worried, numb, guilty or sad
- Feeling alone or isolated
- Trouble sleeping
- Anger outbursts
- Feeling tense, on edge, agitated, or easily startled
- Losing interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Thoughts of harming yourself or others

Today PTSD is recognized as a treatable illness. Treatments include psychotherapy, medication or both. If you think you may have signs of PTSD, seek professional help from your doctor, a mental health professional or the Employee Assistance Program.

Most people who experience a traumatic event never go on to develop PTSD.

What can family members and friends do to help survivors of a traumatic event?

It is important for family and friends to listen well to the trauma survivor. Being understanding and empathetic is helpful, as is allowing the person to discuss the emotions that may result, and giving them the space and time to do so. Family and friends should also offer assistance if they can. Helping survivors with basic tasks/needs of living can be very comforting. Reassuring the survivor that they are safe now is always important.

What if these feelings just won't go away?

If you recently experienced a trauma, unpleasant and disturbing feelings are sometimes a part of a natural human reaction and healing process. However, if these feelings persist, intensify, or seem severe to the point where you are not able to carry on life in a manner that is normal for you, please seek help.

Resources you may turn to include your doctor or primary health care provider, a mental health professional, self-help or support groups, or the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP services are confidential and are provided by your employer at no cost to you. Employees and their dependent family members are eligible for EAP services.

For further assistance through the EAP, please contact ESPYR at **(888) 960-3305**. You may speak with an EAP counselor or arrange in-person EAP counseling. You may also securely request EAP services from the website: www.espyr.com. Your password is: **USGcares**. More information about the Employee Assistance Program is also available at this website and on the ESPYR app.