



Ways to Care for Yourself after a Traumatic Event

Research has shown that the way in which a person takes care of him or herself during the first few days following a traumatic event will help to minimize the development of future psychological reactions to the event. Understanding the reactions of your body and your emotions can help you deal with the trauma of the event.

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

Your body and brain work together in reaction to things that happen to you. As a result, you experience both emotional feelings and physical reactions to events. Sometimes these reactions are pleasurable, such as when you receive praise from someone. Other situations cause reactions of stress and discomfort. Physical reactions can range from muscle tension, headache, elevated blood pressure, stomach distress, nausea, pain and almost any kind of physical symptom. Emotional reactions to a trauma can include anxiety, panic, depression, anger, panic, depression, anger, sleep disturbance and irritability, to name just a few. (See our [Stress Symptom checklist](#)).

TRY TO EAT WELL AND EXERCISE WITHIN YOUR CAPABILITIES

People respond differently to traumatic events. It is hard to predict who will react strongly and who will show little reaction to a particular event. If you have strong reactions, it does not mean that you are mentally weak or mentally ill. Reactions to traumatic events are considered “normal reactions to abnormal events.” If you find that after several weeks you are still unable to cope with your feelings, you may want to consider getting extra help through a mental health professional. This does not mean you are mentally ill, but simply means that your reaction needs more attention.

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AFTER A TRAUMATIC EVENT:

- ◆ **Avoid Alcohol use.** Although you may feel like going home and relaxing with a glass of wine, it is very important that you avoid alcohol for at least 24 hours. The reason is that alcohol works on the way which you preserve memories of recent events. Because alcohol tends to “numb” your feelings, its influence causes your memories to be preserved in unpredictable ways. It is very important that your brain have the opportunity to deal with all aspects of a traumatic event so that you will less likely to be bothered by it later in ways that you may not understand.
- ◆ **Avoid caffeine.** Caffeine is a stimulant. You need to relax and be calm. The stimulation of both caffeine and a traumatic event may make it harder to cope and settle down.

- ◆ **Communicate about the event.** Your mind needs to process what happened so that it can resolve your personal feelings. Talk with your co-workers, manager, EAP counselor, family member and friends. Bottling up your feelings will inevitably cause them to appear later in unpredictable ways. You may want to bring home the phone numbers of some of your co-workers to give support to one another in the coming days.
- ◆ **Ask for Nurturing and Understanding when you return home.** Sometimes friends and family may not understand the feelings you experience following a traumatic event. Ask your loved ones to help you relax by being supportive and understanding.
- ◆ **Use natural methods to relax.** A warm bath, massage and/or soothing music are much better means of relaxing after a traumatic event than alcoholic beverages. Think in terms of pampering yourself after a difficult experience. Exercise within healthful limits is also great way to deal with stress.
- ◆ **Seek help if the stress symptoms do not diminish after a reasonable amount of time.** You may want to consider getting some additional help through a mental health professional. Prompt attention to traumatic stress can often minimize long-term effects.

STRESS SYMPTOM CHECKLIST

Physical

Trembling
 Dizziness
 Pounding heart
 Dry throat
 Sweating
 Fatigue
 Headaches
 Nail Biting
 Blushing
 Sore neck
 Stomach disorders
 Trouble breathing
 Tense muscles

Behavioral

Impulsiveness
 Abnormal eating habits
 Unusual weight change
 Stuttering rapid speech
 Grinding of teeth
 Tics
 Increased smoking
 Social withdrawal
 Increased alcohol or drug use
 Sleep disturbance
 Compulsive behaviors
 Unusual behavior changes
 Unexplained weeping

Psychological

Irritability
 Depression
 Moodiness
 Anxiety
 concentrating
 Inability to relax