

Responder Self Care: Caring For Yourself in the Face of Difficult Work

Coping With a Traumatic Event

A traumatic event is a situation that threatens your safety or the safety of others in your environment. Whether you are directly or indirectly impacted by trauma, you may experience intense feelings of fear, hopelessness, or anxiety.

Common Reactions to Traumatic Events

- Strong emotions including shock, fear, anger, grief, confusion, and horror
- Feelings of helplessness, disbelief, powerlessness, disconnectedness, or aloneness
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Difficulties sleeping
- Nightmares or disturbing dreams
- Intrusive or upsetting thoughts or memories of the event
- Having strong reactions to things that remind you of the event
- Problems with concentration, learning, and decision-making
- Extreme mood swings, irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger
- Headaches, stomachaches, rashes, or other allergic reactions
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- Not wanting to share crisis job related responsibilities, or relinquish control of the situation
- Feelings of foreboding or impending doom, or feelings of fear about the future
- Increased concern about the safety of loved ones or about your own safety
- Thoughts of death or suicide; persistent feelings of pessimism

Coping Techniques

- Stay connected to friends and family—many people find it helpful to talk with others about what happened, but even those who prefer not to talk can find comfort in being with loved ones.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well, get enough exercise and sleep.
- Do activities you enjoy or find relaxing.
- Avoid excessive drinking—remember that alcohol is a depressant.
- Try to get back to your normal routine, but be aware that you may need to do some extra self-care.
- Don't make big life-changing decisions for several months.
- Take time to grieve—traumatic events often leave us with a sense of loss.



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- Do something positive to help others - give blood, donate food, volunteer.
- Ask others directly for what you need and want.
- Act on facts about what has happened, not speculation or rumors.

How Do I Know If I Need Professional Help?

In general, professional support is a good idea if you're having trouble coping on your own.

Strong feelings that won't go away, that last longer than a few weeks, or are interfering with normal functioning may be symptoms of depression, anxiety, or a post-traumatic reaction.

Many people do not seek professional help because they blame their symptoms on personal weakness or think that they should

deal with their problems on their own. Many people, however, find that counseling helps them deal with their feelings more effectively.

Caring For Yourself In The Face Of Difficult Work

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing our work with care, energy, and compassion

10 things to do each day

1. Get enough sleep
2. Get enough to eat
3. Vary the work that you do
4. Do some light exercise
5. Do something pleasurable
6. Focus on what you did well
7. Learn from your mistakes
8. Share a private joke
9. Pray, meditate or relax
10. Support a colleague

Contact your local public health agency for more information. If you need the phone number, please call MDH at 651-201-5000

Adapted from "A Guide to Managing Stress in Crisis Response Professionals," HHS, SAMHSA, CMH 2005, and Idaho State University Institute of Rural Health.



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