

Coping with a Traumatic Event



In dealing with the emotional aftermath of a traumatic event, it is normal to experience a wide range of emotions and even physical responses. At these times it is especially important to remain aware of our internal reactions in order to respond in a way that is most helpful for ourselves, our loved ones and those directly impacted.

Remember these feelings could surface for individuals at different times. Although you may not have a strong response today, you may have one a week or month from now and that is normal - everyone responds differently to trauma, grief, and loss. Below is a list of common reactions to trauma, grief and loss.

Emotional Responses

- Shock or numbness
- Anger toward others involved
- Depression and sadness
- Fear and frustration
- Feeling unsafe or vulnerable
- Loneliness
- Guilt

Mental Responses

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering details of events

Physical Responses

- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in appetite
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Dizziness and headaches
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate
- Upset stomach

Behavioral Responses

- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts, irritability
- Crying
- Decreased energy and ambition
- Relationship conflict
- Increased use of alcohol or medications
- Fear of being alone

When dealing with the stress of grief and loss you may experience:

- Feeling overwhelmed, you may find it difficult to keep up with your normal routine.
- Traumas or losses that had seemed in the past may resurface.
- Co-workers may also be having a hard time with the loss and may be more irritable or less responsive than normal.
- Family and friends may not know how to respond to your needs or understand your feelings around the loss.

Avoid overreacting or under-reacting. Some examples of overreacting are unnecessarily changing our routines, feeling compelled to stay up-to-the minute on news of the event, pulling children from school or avoiding people, situations or places

because of irrational fears. Some examples of under-reacting are denying that the event concerns you, avoiding or shutting down discussion of the event, not reassuring children that they are safe or making humor of the event. Neither overreacting nor under-reacting adequately deal with distress and delay the return to a feeling of safety.

Some good coping strategies are as follows:

- Talk about your concerns with family, friends, or even a professional.
- Maintain your normal routine.
- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of event.
- Protect younger children from frightening news and images, reassure children that they are safe.
- Engage in stress management such as exercise, rest and play.