

From Crisis to Community: Responding to Trauma

We have all been impacted and touched by the cluster of traumatic events in our recent history. We may have been reminded of other events of loss and trauma that we have survived. We may feel vulnerable, helpless, out of control, sad, angry, guilty – or simply numb, disconnected and distant. We may be moved to tears by the outpouring of support or frustrated we can't do more. We may sense that our personal trauma is not as important, as the events of major disasters or large-scale traumas. The events in our world continue to overshadow individual experiences of loss.

Our daily experience has dramatically changed. Our unpredictable reactions are a natural and normal, even though it can feel crazy and out of control. We may take a look at who and what is meaningful. What we have taken for granted in the past is suddenly more precious. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Taking one moment at a time and honoring our unique and personal truth is the road to healing. Although we can never make it better, we can support each other through the long, sometimes difficult road to recovery.

FEELINGS or REACTIONS THAT OCCUR

When we are faced with sudden trauma, every part of our being is affected. It is not unusual to experience the following:

- **Trembling throughout the body**
- **Loss of body sensations**
- **Uncontrollable crying**
- **Numbness and disbelief**
- **Anger and hostile behavior**
- **Lightheadedness or dizziness**
- **Nausea and/or bad taste in mouth**
- **Sleeplessness, feeling exhausted**
- **Overeating or losing weight**
- **Nightmares or flashbacks**
- **Unidentified fear or panic**
- **Landmines or reminders of trauma**
- **Overwhelming guilt and regret**
- **Sadness/Overwhelming emotion**
- **Survivor's guilt**
- **Emotional distance/unreality**
- **Ambivalence**
- **Violence**
- **Apathy/Loss of meaning**
- **Anxiety and fear/helplessness**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Breathe:** Inhale deeply and slowly into the lungs. Hold for a moment. Then exhale forcefully.
- **You are Normal.** A traumatic, unexpected event has happened to you. Everything may feel crazy to you right now, but in truth, you are experiencing a very natural human response to crisis and loss.
- **Take one moment at a time.** If we attempt to solve all problems at once, we become overwhelmed. Be easy with yourself and take one step -one issue at a time.
- **Try not to watch TV** or listen to the radio for more than one hour at a time. Give yourself breaks. Remember that continuous exposure creates secondary trauma. Your children may experience media replays as new events.
- **Write, draw or talk** about your feelings. Don't keep it inside. This just increases isolation.
- **Do something active and positive** that is life affirming for the impacted communities or families affected.
- **Keep a regular schedule.** Try to eat and sleep as normally as you can.
- **Keep an ongoing journal** of your dreams and feelings.
- **Meet with support groups** to share feelings and thoughts on a regular basis.
- **Inform significant others** and employers of your situation. Build your support systems early.
- **Be gentle with yourself and others.** Each of us handles loss, trauma and grief in different ways. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to cope with tragedy.

Good Questions:

What is the most difficult right now?

What do I need right now to get through it?

Four Steps to Healing: Acknowledge, Express, Act, Reconnect

The Centre for Living with Dying program has been on the front lines for 40 years providing immediate support to individuals, families, groups, healthcare agencies, businesses and organizations facing a traumatic situation of loss, death or grief. We are here for you. Immediate support and education is available for any organization or individual requesting assistance.

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