



Dealing with traumatic events

When a disaster or traumatic event occurs, it can be highly distressing for everyone impacted.

Below are some strategies for those who are feeling the impact in various ways and levels of severity. We are all different and will experience exposure to traumatic events, both directly and indirectly, in different ways.

For yourself: Things you can do

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing experience and give yourself permission to react (don't be angry at yourself for being upset).
- Remember there is not right or wrong way to feel.
- Remind yourself that you are coping.
- Make a conscious choice to survive intense emotions.
- Make sure that you take time to rest, to be with people who support you.
- Take time to think about what has happened. Gradually confronting what has happened can assist to come to terms with a traumatic experience.
- Share your experience with people you trust when you are ready to talk about it.
- Take control of seemingly small things. When life seems out of control, begin to reclaim it a little at a time.
- Focus on self-care. Allow yourself time to rest if you are feeling fatigued. Maintaining a regular routine such as healthy food, water, rest, appropriate exercise, sleep and spending time with those you love is important and assist to readjust following distressing experiences.
- Avoid overuse of alcohol or other drugs to cope.
- Give yourself time to adjust. Resilience is the norm, but it can take time to bounce back.

For your colleagues

One of the most important things you can do to help your grieving colleagues is to free yourself from feeling like you have to somehow fix them or take away their pain. You can't do that and people don't want you to try. This means opening yourself to feeling a degree of helplessness – something which makes you a better rather than lesser support!

What grieving people frequently want and need is someone with whom they can share their experience at a rate and level that suits them.

Things you can do

- Offer them the opportunity to let you know how they are going if/when they want, rather than asking them how they are going (e.g. "I'd be happy to hear how it's going for you if you'd like, when you're ready"). Remember that you can't fix it for them but you can 'listen'.
- Listen and empathise with their experience (e.g. "That's really sad" or "I am sorry that this has happened to you). There are no magic words to take away the pain. When it comes to grief, pain is a natural part of loss and is the beginning of healing. If you are not sure what to say you don't need to say anything.
- Refrain from comments that invalidate their experience such as "I know how you feel"; 'it could have been worse'.
- Be patient. Traumatic reactions and grief can last many months. It can also re-surface unexpectedly.
- Ask what you can do to assist with everyday tasks.
- Encourage them to be comfortable expressing their emotions i.e. crying or getting angry.
- Continue your contact in a range of ways and over time. Often it is down the track that people need the support, so stay in touch

Helping children and adolescents

- Be aware that children even if not directly exposed will hear and see news footage and hear stories from various sources that may concern them.
- Allow children to discuss their concerns with you and encourage them to express their fears and anxiety about the traumatic event.
- Reassure them without minimising the reality of the situation
- Focus on routines and getting on with everyday life as much as possible.

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