

When to seek help

- If you feel you cannot handle intense feelings or body sensations.
- If you feel that your emotions are not falling into place over a period of time, you feel chronic tension, confusion, emptiness or exhaustion.
- If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
- If you have no person or group with whom to share your emotions and you feel the need to do so.
- If your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.
- If you have accidents.
- If you continue to smoke, drink or take drugs to excess since the event.
- If your work performance suffers.

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Coping after a Critical Incident

Some basic Do's and Don'ts

DO realise the circumstances were exceptional. You did what you could.

DON 'T reproach yourself.

DO use other people for support and take opportunities to talk about your feelings.

DON'T block out support because of embarrassment and feelings of guilt.

DO try to keep up your normal activities after the acute phase.

DON'T expect too much of yourself.

DO give yourself time. Time out to sleep, rest, think and be with your close family and friends.

DON'T expect to forget all about it. It's happened. It won't upset you for ever, but some memories will stay.

DO drive more carefully.

DO be more careful around the home.

**Accidents are more common
after severe stress**

Coping after a Critical Incident

If you have the misfortune to be a victim of a violent or threatening incident there are some points to remember which can help you overcome the experience. A violent incident is usually a sudden, frightening and unpredictable event. Not many people will ever have to deal with this kind of experience. No one knows how they will react until it happens to them.

During and immediately after the incident it is normal to feel numb at first. This is a natural shock reaction. Later as the various implications of the event come to mind, other symptoms may start to appear. It takes time and space to come to terms with the experience.

Some of the symptoms may occur much later as a delayed reaction. You may only start to respond emotionally as you recount your experience to the police or when telling your family or friends. These experiences are normal so try not to worry. You are not losing control.

Getting your feelings “off your chest” with someone who you can talk to, helps the process of readjustment. It may be necessary to tell your story several times, that’s OK, too. Locking your feelings inside can lead to nervous and physical problems. Do not be afraid to share your feelings with others.

Normal feelings and emotions you may experience

WORRY

- fear of what might have happened.
e.g. 'I could have been badly hurt'.
- fear of being left alone.
- wariness of being in similar situations
(*this feeling can persist for a long time*).
- feeling vulnerable.
- fear of it happening again.
- easily startled by sudden noise or unexpected events.

FEELING LOW

- guilty about not dealing with the incident in the perfect way
- loss of dignity
- loss of control over what happens to you
- a feeling of helplessness
- temporary loss of freedom to enjoy life.
- tearful

ANGER

- at whoever caused it or allowed it to happen.

REGRETS

- feeling ashamed for not being a hero
- feeling guilt at allowing theft/damage to property, etc.
- feeling guilt if someone else is injured

PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS

- feeling fuzzy in the head, unable to concentrate
- exhaustion (stressful events use up energy)
- sleeplessness or excessive sleep
- nausea and diarrhoea
- loss of appetite or excessive eating
- loss of sexual interest
- muscular tension leading to assorted aches and pains
- greater vulnerability to infection.

Traumatic experiences put demands on your physical, mental and emotional resources so it is important to look after yourself. Taking care of yourself is not difficult but it does take extra effort at a time when you may be preoccupied with the upsetting experience. The following list of basics may help to remind you. how to take care of yourself.

DO REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE BASICALLY THE SAME PERSON THAT YOU WERE BEFORE THE EVENT.

REMEMBER THAT THERE IS A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL.

Generally the symptoms of stress will subside after a few days or weeks, depending on the severity of the incident. Feelings may be triggered again by further police investigations, court appearances, anniversaries of the incident, real or fictional depictions of similar experiences. If any symptoms persist over a long period and they are causing you distress or preventing you from leading a normal life, do seek help.

DO REMEMBER THAT IF YOU SUFFER TOO MUCH OR TOO LONG, HELP IS AVAILABLE.