

Coping *with a* Traumatic Event

After a crisis, it's normal to experience temporary changes in your thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and body. Being in tune with these changes – and not trying to rush or deny them – can help you heal.

It's not uncommon to have these reactions:

- Avoiding situations or conversations that might remind you of the traumatic event
- A sense that life is out of balance
- Feeling numb or not believing the event happened
- A sense of re-living the event
- Feeling jumpy or sensitive to noise
- Wanting to be alone or not wanting to be alone at all
- Sadness
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares or wanting to sleep for a long time
- Feeling very hungry or not hungry at all
- Anger
- Irritability
- Finding it hard to focus or make decisions
- Forgetting things
- Aches, pains or feeling like you have the flu
- Feeling guilty that others have suffered more than you

- Wanting to use more alcohol or drugs
- Feeling like you're out of control
- Self-doubt

These reactions usually do not last for very long and can vary widely from one day to the next. If you have been busy getting your life back in order after the crisis, your reactions may be delayed until you slow down.

Self-help tips

- Don't push thoughts and memories of the event away. It usually helps to talk about them with someone you trust.
- Plan extra time to do usual tasks. It may be harder to focus.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink and don't use drugs. (While alcohol and drugs may make you feel better in the short-term, they can interfere with your body's ability to heal.)
- Get more sleep or rest when you need it.
- Eat a healthy diet and don't skip meals or eat more than usual.

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- Avoid making big changes or starting new projects until you feel better.
- Stay in your usual routine as much as possible.
- Practice different ways to relax, such as slow breathing, guided imagery or meditation.
- Do something that you enjoy. For example, get a massage, play with your pet or spend some time in your garden.
- Avoid the news or violent movies or TV shows, especially at bedtime, until you feel better.
- “Face down” your anxiety and fears by returning to normal activities as soon as possible.
- Consider seeing an EAP counselor or a qualified mental health provider.
- If you see any major changes in yourself that last longer than you are comfortable with.
- If you suddenly feel aches and pains or an illness feels worse. (Check with your doctor. Aches and pains or an illness can really be due to an emotional cause.)
- When you are having problems sleeping.
- If you feel sad, irritable or anxious on an ongoing basis.
- If substance use occurs.

Remember – If you have thoughts of hurting yourself or others, call your EAP or call 911.

When to ask for help

- If your symptoms don't show some or great improvement within a few weeks.
- When you or your family have any questions about what you are feeling.