Coping with Trauma

Sexual Violence Sexual Harassment Training (Additional Resources)

As details about tragedies unfold, it is normal to have a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

If you have experienced past traumas, including deaths, losses, violence, or other assaults, you may be experiencing memories and feelings from those events and have increased symptoms now. For very public traumas, even those who have not directly experienced the crisis may be affected.

COMMON REACTIONS

Please recognize that experiencing any of these can be normal reactions and that, with time, there is a natural healing process which occurs. Over the next few days or weeks you may experience periods of:

- Denial, shock, numbness
- Fatigue
- Shock, numbness
- Disturbing images or memories
- Confusion
- Nausea, headaches
- Moodiness and irritability
- Feeling vulnerable or unsafe
- Anxiety, worrying, panic
- Social withdrawal
- Jumpiness, hyper-vigilance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Guilt
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feelings of helplessness
- Anger and blame of others.
- Sadness, depression
- Numbness or feeling like you are not reacting
- Jumpiness, hyper-vigilance
- Social withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Disturbing images or memories
- Anxiety, worrying, panic
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- Guilt
- Feelings of helplessness
- Sadness, depression
- Numbness or feeling like you are not reacting

REASONS YOU MAY BE STRUGGLING

The death of a loved one
Traumatic events often include injury and death. You may have known someone who died during a tragic event, or this event may remind you of other deaths or losses. Even the death of a pet can be traumatic. Symptoms of grief and loss are similar to the post-trauma symptoms listed above, and many of the coping strategies listed below can help for grief as well.

The effects of cumulative trauma
Psychologically, we connect traumas. If you experience a new trauma before you’ve had enough time to heal from previous trauma, you may experience the separate events as related. This can lead to intensified symptoms and prolonged recovery time. As a result of multiple traumatic incidents, you may experience a greater sense of disconnectedness from yourself, others, and your work. Seek out support from a friend or counselor to help restore your sense of order and control.

Fear for your own safety
Tragedies that occur on another college campus may create additional feelings of fear for your own safety on campus. This feeling is normal, yet it also gives us an opportunity to strengthen our community. There are some actions you can take to feel more in control of your safety and environment: pay attention to our own surroundings; talk with other students; seek counseling for yourself or group counseling for your living communities; speak up if you feel someone around you needs help - whether that means seeking counseling or calling the campus police.

Post-trauma at the workplace
After a traumatic event, your colleagues and co-workers may also experience some of the reactions listed above. Worksite group meetings to discuss individual experiences and plans for the future can be very helpful. Remember that each person can experience trauma differently. By extending patience and understanding you can support yourself and others in readjusting to life after a crisis.

Traumatized children
Children who have experienced a trauma first or second-hand need special attention. Children’s symptoms may include excessive fears, unwillingness to go to school, nightmares, and increases in regressive behaviors such as bedwetting and thumb sucking. Give your child an opportunity to ask questions and respond in age-appropriate ways. Remember that your child may hear others talk about the trauma, and that without clear information, they can gain a distorted view of the crisis. Reassure your child by increasing physical contact, keeping in touch, and making plans to do things together.
COPING WITH THESE REACTIONS

People can take steps to help themselves, family members and each other cope with stress reactions.

Experience your thoughts and feelings
You have the right to have thoughts and feelings even if you were not directly affected and remind yourself you are normal and having normal reactions.

Talk about your thoughts and feelings
Even when the trauma is something that is being talked about publicly, it is important to talk to others about how you are affected. Talk to someone who feels safe to you.

Take care of yourself
Take care of your body by watching what/how much you eat, your use of alcohol, drugs, caffeine, nicotine, sugar and medicine and by practicing safe sex. Be sure to do some regular exercise and be more attentive when driving.

Take time
Be good to yourself—spent time with people you care about and do things that make you feel better. Take breaks, schedule pleasant activities, engage in positive distracting activities such as sports, hobbies and reading.

Have empathy
Each person experiences trauma differently and that you and others may have different needs at different times, try to be flexible. Remember that when under stress you may not react in a manner you would normally expect.

Moderate your news intake
If the trauma is widely publicized, be mindful of how the media reports affect you. While having information is helpful for some crisis, some people may want to limit how much they read, listen to or watch the news.

School and work
If you are having trouble concentrating in class or work talk to your professors or boss about how to handle your workload and still give yourself time to recover.

Take action
While you do not want to make big life changes in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event, find ways to express your thoughts and feelings about the trauma. Suggestions include political action, community service and spiritual/religious practice to name a few.

Seek support
From campus and community resources. Consult a mental health professional if you need assistance or want to gauge your reactions.

When and how to seek help
Stress reactions usually diminish in severity over time. However, if your symptoms persist, cause you excessive discomfort, or increase over time you may want to seek professional assistance.

*This information is credited to UC Berkeley University Health Services.