

How To Look After Yourself Following A Trauma

A Thrive Worldwide Resource

We all respond to crisis in different ways. Some may respond with a strong emotional reaction, while others may feel detached, some with anger and others with sadness.

Response to crisis is as varied as each of our personalities, yet most of us will usually feel quite disoriented in facing new realities and the need to make adjustments.

Take a look through the common reactions after a traumatic event and keep tabs on changes you are experiencing. These are normal reactions, and will vary from person to person, event to

event. However, if these symptoms persist and are having a negative impact on your life one month after the event, we recommend getting professional help.

ANY CHANGES IN YOUR BODY?

Immediately after (first 24 hours):

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Pounding heart
- Shortness of breath

Following days:

- Digestive/stomach problems
- Weight loss or gain
- Fatigue/tiredness
- Sleep problems
- Headaches, or other general pain
- Feeling physically charged or tense muscles
- Heart problems
- Susceptible to sickness/infections
- Worsening of existing medical problems

ANY CHANGES IN YOUR EMOTIONS?

Immediately after (first 24 hours):

- Intense fear
- Easily startled/jumpy
- Extreme emotions such as crying or shouting
- Guilt and shame
- Shock or numbness

Following days:

- Sadness
- Irritable/easily angered
- Constant worry, fear or paranoia
- Hopelessness or meaninglessness
- Self-blame
- Feeling flat, not finding pleasure
- Low self-esteem
- Disturbing dreams

ANY CHANGES IN YOUR THINKING?

Immediately after (first 24 hours):

- Disoriented and confused
- Denial/disbelief
- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Impulse to make big decisions

Following days:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of creativity
- Obsessing and/or ruminating
- Poor decision-making ability
- Cynicism and pessimism

There is no “right” way of responding in the aftermath of crisis. There are however, choices you can make to reduce the negative impact in the long run. Here are a few ideas for you to consider as you and your colleagues, friends and families move forward:

Self-compassion

As noted, we all respond differently to trauma. Accept the way that you have responded and be kind to yourself. You may need to lower personal expectations, or decide not to

ANY CHANGES IN YOUR BEHAVIOURS?

Immediately after (first 24 hours):

- Crying
- Shouting
- Substance use

Following days:

- Withdrawing socially
- Increase in smoking/drinking
- Eating more or less
- Interpersonal conflict
- Reduced performance
- Staying in bed
- Deflecting conflict or tension
- Carelessness or risky activity

fight the emotions inside you.

Routine

Put one foot in front of the other. Begin establishing a new routine with familiar tasks. Are there ways in which you can simply “show-up” in providing some structure in your day.

Ask for help

You may or may not feel the need for help. We recommend that you reach out to a trusted friend or a professional either way. Seeking help may mean that you overcome pride or

skepticism for the sake of self-care. Processing the event mitigates the potential for delayed and cumulative effects of trauma and is a necessity in many humanitarian roles. If trauma symptoms persist for longer than one month, it's time to get help.



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Connect.

Relationships have proven time and again to be the most significant protective factor during crisis—and in life in general. You may have an impulse to withdrawal—this is an impulse to resist. Be intentional about connecting.

Move.

Do something that gets you sweating and breathing. Aerobic exercise makes our brains

release endorphins that can lighten your mood and give you fresh perspective. It has the ability to turn the body's stress reaction down, making it possible to become more relaxed. Whether it's yoga, running, walking, football, etc... give yourself the gift of exercise.

Be aware of the quick fixes.

Life after trauma is hard and it's understandable that you may have needed some quick fixes. They may have served their purpose, but be mindful that their long-term impact goes against your holistic wellbeing.

We turn to quick fixes, often unconsciously, because facing the thoughts and feelings of loss and grief can be overwhelming. Most of us have our “go-to” tactics for escaping. These habits become exceedingly dangerous when they become normal and, in effect, prevent us from accepting reality and moving forward.

What are your crutches? Check out the list of behaviors above and do some personal inventory.

Lets not forget that if we're not well we can't do our work well and our relationships will struggle. It may feel counterintuitive, but the best thing to do when recovering from a trauma is to prioritize yourself and your process.

SOME RESOURCES TO CONSIDER

Thrive Worldwide offers a range of psychosocial services including: post-crisis/trauma assessment, psychological first aid (group/individual), trauma-focused counseling, debriefing, and life coaching. Book an appointment by emailing info https://thrive-worldwide.org_

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