Tips and tools for understanding and recovering from a traumatic event

Following a traumatic event, you are likely to experience a wide range of overlapping feelings and emotions. Unfortunately, just when you think you are beginning to heal, these intense feelings may come back to hit you all over again.



Understand that you are going through a normal post-traumatic stage. The feelings you are experiencing are common and you should begin to feel more like your normal self in four to six weeks. If intense feelings linger much longer than this, contact a doctor or counsellor—they can introduce you to some additional coping strategies to help you get through this difficult period.

Some of the more common things people experience after a traumatic event include:

Physical symptoms can include:	• Nausea • Upset stomach • Tremors (hands, lips) • Feeling uncoordinated • Profuse sweating • Chills • Diarrhea • Chest pain (should be checked at the hospital)	• Rapid heart beat • Rapid breathing • Increased blood pressure • Headaches • Muscle aches • Sleep disturbance
Thought processes can also be affected. Common experiences include:	• Slowed thinking • Difficulty making decisions • Difficulty in problem solving • Confusion • Disorientation • Difficulty calculating • Difficulty concentrating	• Memory problems • Difficulty naming common objects • Seeing the event repeatedly • Distressing dreams • Poor attention span
Emotional symptoms can include:	• Anxiety • Fear • Guilt • Grief • Depression • Sadness • Feeling lost • Feeling abandoned • Feeling isolated	• Worrying about others • Wanting to limit contact with others • Anger • Irritability • Feeling numb • Feeling startled • Feeling shocked

Stages of recovery

The stages of dealing with a trauma can often follow a certain course. Understanding the various emotions that you are likely to encounter can help in resuming normalcy and a regular daily routine. The following are some typical feelings you may experience.

However, the order in which these may occur, how long you deal with each stage vary from person to person. And remember, even if you have experienced one stage, that doesn't mean you won't experience it again. Dealing with the effects of trauma is an ongoing process.

Shock, disbelief, numbness	• "It didn't seem real." • "I thought it was a joke." • "It felt like it was a movie."
Fear and vulnerability	• "I don't feel safe." • "I now check the doors at home to make sure they're locked." • "I get nervous when someone I don't recognize comes in."
Anger	• "We shouldn't be treated that way." • "It's not fair."
Depression	• "I can't get it out of my mind." • "I feel overwhelmed." • "I just have no energy."
Denial	• "I don't want to talk about it all over again." • "I'm fine as long as I keep it out of my mind."
Resolution	• "It'll be hard to forget, but life seems back to normal."
Reactions after the initial shock subsides	• Intense feelings • Memories of the event playing over and over in your mind • Recurring emotional reactions, like the sound of sirens, are common • Tension in your relationships at home and at work

Tips on how to cope

At work

- Remember that what you are experiencing is normal
- Try to talk with other employees about the event
- Find out what resources are available
- Avoid driving while you are distressed—consider carpooling with colleagues or taking a taxi
- If you're feeling especially distressed, talk to your supervisor

At home

- Stick to a routine. Especially if you were routine-oriented before, keeping to a schedule and engaging in regular activities can do a lot to help you feel at ease again

- Take time for rest and relaxation. It's an important component of recovery

- Check in with your spouse or other family members to see how they're coping. Are there things they can help you with? Are there things they would like to talk about or feel they need help with?
- Get some exercise. Working out, going for a brisk walk or engaging in favourite sports can help you process the stress you're experiencing.
- Eat well and get as whatever rest you need. These basics of living are key in helping you get back on your feet again.

Though the process of healing after a traumatic experience can sometimes feel as intense or frightening as the traumatic event itself, with time and care, you can get back on your feet again. Talking about your experience can be an important part of the recovery process. If you would like to speak with someone to help you get through this difficult time, talk to a professional.