

Traumatic Events Information Sheet

You have experienced a traumatic event (an injury, loss of someone you cared about, or other type of emotionally overwhelming event). Even though the event may be over, you may be experiencing or later may experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact, normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours, day, weeks or even months later. In some cases, years may pass before the symptoms appear. Occasionally, no symptoms or problems occur.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, weeks, or longer depending on the severity of the event. With understanding and the support of loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness, only that the event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Here are some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction after a traumatic event:

- **Physical:** nausea, tremors, chills, diarrhea, rapid heartbeat, headaches, sleep disturbance, and fatigue.
- **Mental:** slowed thinking, hard to made decisions, hard to problem-solve, confusion, disorientation, concentration problems, memory problems, intrusive images, intrusive thoughts, and frustration.
- **Emotional:** anxiety, fear, guilt, grief, depression, feeling lost, feeling numb, irritability, anger and feeling isolated.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the above, it is important to remember that these are NORMAL reactions, from a NORMAL person, who is trying to cope with an ABNORMAL event.

There are some things you can do to help speed up the recovery process. Sometimes just knowing that what we are going through is a normal reaction can help, but usually it is important to talk to others, especially those who have gone through this experience or a similar one. Talking about it helps the most.

Helpful Hints for Recovery

Some of the following hints may help to alleviate the emotional pain associated with a traumatic event. For the next few days you should consider eating a more healthy diet and eating/drinking less caffeine, salt, sugar and alcohol.

| What you can do for yourself | What you can do for your family member or friend |
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| Try to get a lot of rest. | Listen carefully. |
| Talk to friends. | Spend time with your loved ones. |
| Do not be alone for a while. | Offer a listening ear even if they do not ask. |
| Intrusive thought/images are normal – don't try to fight them. They will decrease over time and become less painful. | Reassure them that they are safe. |

| What you can do for yourself | What you can do for your family member or friend |
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| Maintain a normal schedule as much as you can. Don't try to over do it. Take breaks whenever needed. | Help them with every day tasks like cleaning, cooking, and taking care of their children. |
| Eat well-balanced and regular meals. (Even if you don't feel like it.) | Give them some private time. |
| Try to keep a reasonable level of activity. | Do not take their anger or other feelings personally. |
| Fight against boredom. | Do not tell them "things could have been worse". This is not a consoling statement. Instead tell them you are sorry this happened to them and let them know that you are there for them. |
| Physical activity is helpful. | Do not be surprised if your loved one only wants to talk about the incident with their colleagues, just as long as they are talking to someone. |
| Reestablish a normal schedule as soon as possible. But don't try to push things too fast. | |
| Express your feelings as they rise. | |
| Talk to people who love you. | |

If the symptoms described above are severe or if they last longer than six weeks, you or the one you love may be in need of professional help. You or your friend/family member may contact Grand Valley's Counseling Center at (616) 331-3266 for assistance.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The information on this sheet is taken from the work of Jeffery T. Mitchell of the University of Maryland.