

Ways to care for yourself after a traumatic event

- 1. Avoid alcohol use.** Although you may feel like going home and relaxing with a glass of wine, it is very important that you avoid alcohol for at least 24 hours. The reason is that alcohol works on the way in which you preserve memories of recent events. Because alcohol tends to “numb” your feelings its influence causes your memories to be preserved in unpredictable ways. It is very important that your brain have the opportunity to deal with all aspects of a traumatic event so that you will be less likely to be bothered by it later in ways that you may not understand.
- 2. Avoid caffeine.** Caffeine is a stimulant. You need to relax and be calm. The stimulation of both caffeine and a traumatic event may make it harder to cope and settle down.
- 3. Communicate about the event.** Your mind needs to process what happened so that it can resolve your personal feelings. Talk with your co-workers, manager, EAP counselor, family member and friends. Bottling up your feelings will inevitable cause them to appear later in unpredictable ways. You may want to bring home the phone numbers of some of your co-workers to give support to one another in the coming days.
- 4. Ask for nurturing and understanding when you return home.** Sometimes friends and family may not understand the feelings you experience following a traumatic event. Ask your loved ones to help you relax by being supportive and understanding.
- 5. Use natural methods to relax.** A warm bath, massage and/or favorite music are much better means of relaxing after a traumatic event than alcoholic beverages. Think in terms of pampering yourself after a difficult experience. Exercise within healthful limits is also a great way to deal with stress.
- 6. Seek help if the stress symptoms do not diminish after a reasonable amount of time.** You may want to consider getting some additional help through your EAP program (if available) or through a mental health professional. Prompt attention to traumatic stress can often minimize long-term effects.

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Your Employee Assistance Program is: _____

Their Telephone Number is: _____

Caring for Yourself after a traumatic event



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Research has shown that the way in which a person takes care of him or herself during the first few days following a traumatic event will help to minimize the development of future psychological reactions to the event. Understanding the reactions of your body and your emotions can help you deal with the trauma of this event.

This brochure has been prepared to provide you with information to take home to help you deal with your reactions to recent events.

Be Gentle with Yourself

Try to Eat Well and Exercise Within Your Current Capabilities

Your body and brain work together in reaction to things that happen to you. As a result, you experience both emotional feelings and physical reactions to events. Sometimes these reactions are pleasurable, such as when you receive praise from someone. Other situations cause reactions of stress and discomfort. Physical reactions can range from muscle tension, headache, elevated blood pressure, stomach distress, nausea, pain and almost any kind of physical symptom. Emotional reactions to trauma can include anxiety, panic, depression, anger, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance and irritability, to name just a few.

People respond differently to traumatic events. It is hard to predict who will react strongly and who will show little reaction to a particular event. If you have a strong reaction, it does not mean that you are mentally weak or mentally ill. Reactions to traumatic events are considered “normal reactions to abnormal events”. If you find that after a few weeks you are still unable to cope with your feelings, you may want to consider getting extra help through an employee assistance or mental health professional. This does not mean you are mentally ill, but simply means that your reaction needs more attention.

Stress Symptom Checklist

Physical

Trembling
Dizziness
Pounding heart
Dry throat
Sweating
Tense muscles
Fatigue
Headaches
Backaches
Blushing
Sore neck
Sore shoulders
Stomach distress
Troubled breathing

Psychological

Irritability
Depression
Moodiness
Anxiety
Difficulty concentrating
Inability to relax
Boredom
Social withdrawal

Behavioral

Impulsive behavior
Abnormal eating habits
Unusual weight change
Stuttering, rapid speech
Grinding of teeth
Tics
Increased smoking
Nail biting
Increased alcohol and drug use
Sleep disturbances
Compulsive behaviors
Unusual behavior changes
Unexplained weeping