

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Coping with the After-Effects of a Traumatic Event

Experiencing a traumatic event may trigger strong emotional reactions. While these feelings are normal, they can still be demanding and draining. Keep in mind that it can take days, if not weeks, to return to any semblance of your normal routine.

How we react to specific events depends on many things. For example, if you have been involved in a previous trauma, or if your present life circumstances are difficult, you may react more strongly than others would. Some people find that they experience reaction and effects of a trauma even if they have not been directly involved in the incident.

Ways to Manage

Recognizing the normal and natural reactions to traumatic events is the first step to being able to cope with the personal aftermath of trauma. The following information will help you understand the reactions you may encounter and includes helpful strategies to help you get through this challenging period:

Different stages of coping:

- Immediately after the experience, you are likely to be in shock, experiencing numbness and feeling out of touch with reality.
- You may become fearful and feel exhausted. This may last a few days or up to a week.
- After a while, you may believe you have mastered your feelings, but later find that the same early emotions keep returning from time to time. Some people describe this as feeling as though they are on an emotional roller-coaster.
- Gradually, feelings of fear decrease in intensity and return less frequently. You become detached from the event and begin to feel you are coping well.

The effects of fear. Many people experience the following or similar effects after a traumatic event:

- Unexpectedly fearing strangers
- Dreaming about the event
- Checking the back seat of your car before getting in
- Being overprotective of others, particularly young children

Other common reactions can include:

- Feeling exhausted for no particular reason
- Difficult or broken sleep patterns
- Lack of energy for normal activities
- Difficulty concentrating on, or remember everyday tasks
- Feeling that the normal demands of work and home are overwhelming
- Easily irritated by little things, like noise
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs, particularly in reaction to difficult emotions or for help in falling asleep

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Now is the time to make sure you take really good care of yourself. Do your best to:

- Engage in activities you enjoy
- Spend time with good friends and loved ones
- Eat healthy foods
- Get plenty of rest
- Exercise regularly
- Listen to your body's needs
- Refrain from using cigarettes, alcohol and drugs
- Talk to others who have experienced a similar event
- Reach out to spiritual leaders and doctors who can also prove good sources of support
- Talk about your feelings with your family and friends

Though the process of healing after a traumatic experience can sometimes be as intense or frightening as the traumatic event itself, with time and care, most people are able to get on with healthy lives.