

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

Managing Your Stress: Tips for Survivors of a Traumatic Event

When you are exposed to traumatic events—such as natural disaster, mass violence, or terrorism—be aware of how these events can affect you personally. Most people show signs of stress after such an event. These signs are normal. Over time, as your life gets back to normal, these signs should decrease.

After a stressful event, monitor your own physical and mental health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Know how to relieve stress and know when to get help.

Know the signs of stress.

Your Behavior

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your alcohol use, tobacco use, or use of illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently
- Worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- An inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Your Body

- Having stomachaches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled

Your Emotions

- Being anxious or fearful
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling angry
- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Not caring about anything
- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness
- Your Thinking
- Having trouble remembering things
- Feeling confused
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating

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- Having difficulty making decisions

Know how to relieve stress.

You can manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself.

Keep yourself healthy:

- Eat healthy foods and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Get physical exercise.

Use practical ways to relax:

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, wash your face and hands, or engage in pleasurable hobbies.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities. Do a fun thing after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family.
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.

Pay attention to your body, feelings, and spirit:

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of handling this event and think of how you handled past events.
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after a traumatic event.
- Connect with other survivors of traumatic events or violent crime, many of whom may experience similar difficulties.
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.

Have a plan to manage your tasks.

Do the important things first. If necessary, find a safe place to stay. Tell family where you are and how they can contact you. Get water and food. If needed, get papers for your property, insurance, bank, medical records, and job qualifications from appropriate agencies if you lost them in the traumatic event. It may take time to feel like you've regained control over your life. Be patient with yourself and others.

Know when to get help.

Sometimes things become so overwhelming that you need help from a mental health or substance abuse professional. If you or someone you know threatens to hurt or kill him or herself or another person; looks for ways to kill him or herself; talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide; feels rage or uncontrolled anger; desires revenge; or shows signs of stress for several days or weeks; get help by calling a hotline such as 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or someone else you trust.