

About Experiencing or Witnessing a Traumatic Event

When you experience or witness an event that is traumatic for you, you may feel intense fear, helplessness, terror, or horror or you may find yourself just feeling numb (not feeling anything). Sometimes, you may not realize that you have been traumatized. You may be in shock or unaware of the impact of the event.

During the days or months following the trauma, you may find yourself re-experiencing the event—in dreams, feelings, daydreams and/or conscious thoughts—or trying to avoid any setting that may remind you of trauma. You may feel detached from those around you. You may have difficulty sleeping or find yourself sleeping much more than usual. You may have trouble concentrating—keeping your mind on what you are doing. You may feel unusually fatigued, anxious, sad or depressed.

Some Useful Strategies for Dealing with Your Reactions

First, recognize that you have been exposed to a traumatic event and that it is bound to affect you in some way. Remember that there is no right or wrong way to think or feel about the traumatic event. Any reaction you have is valid. Be accepting of your own feelings and reactions as well as those of others. Different people may react in very different ways.

Talking to others about the event can be very helpful. Tell sympathetic family or friends about your experience. Don't feel over-responsible: Try to understand what your limitations were at the time of the event. People tend to feel that they should have reacted differently or done something to prevent or to lessen the impact of the incident. Be aware that in traumatic situations, most people react in the best way that they can based on their ability and their awareness at the exact moment in time.

Sometimes the trauma has affected your friends and family, and they may not be able to help you or even listen to you. In fact, they may also need someone to talk to.

Counseling Can Be Helpful

Take advantage of the individual and group counseling services available to you. Counseling can help you make sense of your experience—to understand how the trauma has affected you and to understand your feelings and reactions to it.

If you or someone close to you has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event or if you would like more information about reactions to trauma, come in and speak with a professional counselor or you can call for an appointment at (831) 459-2628.

Coping with a Traumatic Incident

Am I feeling normal?

Do I need an appointment with a psychologist?

In the course of a lifetime most of us will experience several personally traumatic incidents. The break up of an important relationship, serious conflict within our family, failing an important exam, the death of a friend or family member, an unwanted pregnancy, a serious health problem, being victimized by a violent act, etc. There are normal reactions to these intense and/or abnormal events. Although painful, these feelings are part of the natural healing process. There's very little you can do to make yourself not experience these uncomfortable feelings, but there are things you can do to promote a healthy recovery. If you have experienced an intense personal situation of traumatic event recently, you may experience some of these reactions:

Physical Reactions

Fatigue, insomnia, hypersomnia, under activity, headaches, nightmares, hyperactivity, startled reactions, exhaustion, diarrhea.

Cognitive Reactions

Difficulty with concentration; solving problems; making decisions; memory disturbance; flashbacks. Inability to attach importance to anything other than the incident.

Emotional Reactions

Fear, guilt, emotional numbing, over sensitivity, anger, irritability, anxiety, depression, violent fantasies, feelings of helplessness, amnesia for the event.