

Healing From Trauma: Helping Others

How to Help Others

If you are a friend or family member of someone who has survived a traumatic event, you can help them heal by:

- Validating the person's view of distress and trauma stories (rather than discrediting, discounting or minimizing) -help the person feel in touch with reality in the present moment (e.g., "you are safe now")
- Educating the person regarding triggers and relapse prevention planning (e.g., help to anticipate difficult times such as anniversaries of the event)
- Helping to explain what is happening in an affirming manner (e.g., "I believe you...you are not crazy. You are having a flashback... This is difficult and you feel crazy but it's because you were hurt badly")
- Discuss directly with the person your concerns about them (e.g., if they are engaging in dangerous behaviors, express your concerns in a non-hostile, caring manner)
- Respecting the person's need to "numb," but also holding them accountable for their behavior
- Focus on enhancing choices, collaboration (e.g., you are not alone), and building and educating a support network
- Helping the person to access relevant services (e.g. contacting mental health or social services), and offering to go with them to appointments.
- Offering support in more than one way. Survivors of trauma differ greatly in their responses to a traumatic event. You may want to offer to spend time together, talk on the phone, or be helpful in other ways such as running errands.

Healing From Trauma: Self-Care

What You Can Do for Yourself

Talk with others. Find safe and supportive people to open up to about the trauma. Allow yourself to recount and talk about the experience. Each time the experience is recounted you can further process and make sense of what has happened. The uncomfortable feelings may gradually diminish with each retelling. Anxieties about the future and about safety can also diminish when you allow yourself to talk openly about your fears and concerns. Other important things you might try:

- Structure your time. Keep busy.
- Beware of numbing your pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, which ultimately compound the problem.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help others as much as possible by sharing feelings and finding out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel out of sorts, nervous or blue, as you have been through an ordeal.
- Keep a journal. Write when you cannot sleep.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize that those around you may be under stress too, and try to be patient.
- Do not make major life changes. Your thinking may not be as clear as usual.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life. For instance, if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them even if you are not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Since recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks can be normal, do not try to fight them. The symptoms decrease over time and become less painful. They represent your mind's natural adaptive efforts to process the information that your world has changed, and your expectable consequent feelings.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if you do not feel like it.