

How to cope with trauma



How we react to specific events depends on many things. For example, personal proximity to this traumatic event, if you have previously experienced a traumatic event in your life, or if your present life circumstances are stressful or unstable, you may react more strongly than others. You may find that you have reactions even though you have not been directly involved in the incident.

Recognising 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 includes helpful strategies and coping mechanisms to help you and your family and friends get through this challenging period.

For yourself

Try to rest.

- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal and will decrease.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
- Engage in comfortable physical activity.
- Express your feelings as they arise.
- Minimise your exposure to media coverage (particularly graphic images).
- Think positively.
- Talk to a counsellor if the feelings become prolonged or too intense.

For family members and friends

- Spend time with the traumatised person.
- Offer a listening ear, even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them of their safety.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, and caring for family.
- Give them some private time.
- Do not take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Do not tell them that they are “lucky it wasn’t worse”.
- Express empathy and understanding.

For children

- Encourage children to say how they are feeling about the event.
- Ask children what they have seen, heard, or experienced.
- Assure children that their parents are taking care of them and will continue to help them deal with anything that makes them feel afraid.
- Help children recognize when they have shown courage in meeting a new scary situation, which can instill a sense of empowerment and increase self-esteem.
- Let children know that institutions of democracy are still in place.
- Know that it is possible for children to experience vicarious trauma from watching media coverage or overhearing adult conversation.