

Trauma Victim Information for Adult Victims of Trauma



International Society
for Traumatic Stress Studies

What is a traumatic event?

Any event involving *actual or possible death, serious injury, or physical or sexual violence* can lead to traumatic stress. There are a number of different ways you can experience trauma. You can experience the stressful event directly, where you are the victim. You can see or hear the stressful event happening to somebody else. You can learn that the event happened to a close relative or friend. Or, you can see or hear realistic details of the death, serious injury, or violence as part of your professional work. Almost all adults have had at least one event in their lifetimes that could be considered traumatic.

What are common responses following a traumatic event?

After trauma people experience a period of recovery – a time when you might have feelings of sadness, anxiety, irritability, and confusion. You might have negative thoughts that are linked to the traumatic event, like blaming yourself for what happened. You might also have relationship problems and have trouble getting along with other people. You might have problems with sleeping. This recovery period can follow a pattern of ups and downs. A number of factors affect how you might respond to a traumatic event and how long a recovery period might last. Not everyone experiences or is affected by a traumatic event in the same way.

Common responses to a traumatic event

- Deep sadness
- Irritability
- Self-blame
- Nervousness
- Increased anxiety
- Confusion
- Negative thoughts
- Relationship problems
- Problems sleeping

What can I do to help my recovery?

Realize that you are recovering from a serious stressor. Take care of yourself. Give yourself the time and energy to heal. Think about what resources you have available to you. These resources will be important in helping you to heal. Ask yourself, “What helped me to cope with stress prior to the traumatic event that will help me now?” These resources can include having a close friend or relative who you can talk to and rely on for support, a friend, neighbor, or relative who can help you with day-to-day tasks or responsibilities, the ability to stay positive and optimistic and to have hope that things will get better, the ability to cope in healthy ways, like getting involved in healthy activities (e.g., art, music, physical activity), and to avoid using unhealthy

ways of coping, like using alcohol or other substances to cope. Also, think about what resources you might not have and work on obtaining them. Now is the time to reach out to others and to your community for help.

Identify resources

- Supportive friends or relatives
- Help with practical responsibilities
- Optimism, hope, and faith
- Activities that give life meaning
- Healthy ways of coping

What can make recovery harder?

Some people have a harder time recovering from a traumatic event. Recovery can be more difficult when the traumatic event is more severe, happens over a longer period of time, is violent, or involves the loss of family or loved ones. Other factors that may make it more difficult to recover include having pre-existing mental health problems, past exposure to traumatic events, including childhood trauma, having difficulty getting helpful practical and emotional support, or having other ongoing life stressors. If you find that you are having a hard time recovering from a traumatic event, you should seek out professional help. Find mental health resources in your community. Consult the ISTSS member provider directory to see if there is a trauma professional near you. If you already have a mental health provider, talk to him or her about these problems and what help is available to you. If at any time you have thoughts about hurting yourself or someone else, call your emergency number (9-1-1 in the United States).

© 2016



One Parkview Plaza, Suite 800
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181 USA
Phone: +1-847-686-2234
Fax: +1-847-686-2253
istss@istss.org
www.istss.org