

# Trauma and Recovery

If you experience a disaster or traumatic event in your life, the days that follow can be emotionally difficult. You may feel overwhelmed by a range of different feelings. Do not be afraid to seek help and talk to someone about what you are experiencing. This information that follows addresses ways you can better manage your emotions and take control of your life following a tragedy.

## After a Traumatic Event

The period that follows a traumatic situation or catastrophic incident is never easy. Such events typically leave emotional scars that take time to heal. During this time, it is normal to feel a range of emotions. It is important to acknowledge these feelings, let them run their course and give yourself time to properly grieve what has happened. This is part of the healing process.

Some of the emotions you may experience include:

- **Shock:** You cannot believe the event happened to you.
- **Fear:** You feel that the event may happen again.
- **Anger:** You feel rage against a higher power, perpetrator or the circumstances that led up to the event. You also may feel that the event was unfair and question why it happened to you.
- **Shame:** You feel that the event (especially sexual abuse) has disgraced you or your family and has violated your innocence.
- **Alienation:** You feel rejected or misunderstood by others or that the event has made you different from others.
- **Helplessness:** You feel frustration for being powerless over the event.
- **Guilt or blame:** You feel that somehow you were responsible for what happened or guilty that you survived and others did not.
- **Mistrust:** You may have unfounded doubts or mistrust about others or similar situations.
- **Sorrow:** You feel incredibly sad that the event happened to you and possibly to others.

Most people respond to traumatic events or situations through a series of coping stages. These stages vary in order and length from person to person:

1. **Outcry:** This stage usually occurs shortly after the trauma. The survivor can feel confused, dazed, anxious and exhausted as he or she tries to process the reality of the event.
2. **Denial:** As a defense mechanism, the survivor may try to hide from what happened, ignore his or her feelings, refuse to talk about what happened or the details of the event or even shut down emotionally.
3. **Intrusion:** Memories and emotions may invade the survivor's consciousness as he or she struggles to come to grips with the loss. The survivor may experience mood changes and irritability, encounter difficulty concentrating, become sensitive to external stimuli and encounter sleep disturbances.
4. **Working through:** The survivor has learned to accept what has happened and adopt strategies to help cope and heal.

## Warning Signs

Survivors of a traumatic event sometimes develop a condition clinically known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can have a variety of symptoms. These symptoms tend to linger in those who do not seek treatment and can seriously interfere with a person's ability to cope with the event. If you experience any of the following symptoms over a prolonged period of time, seek help:

- Recurring nightmares, flashbacks or troubling thoughts about the event
- Regularly being on edge, nervous, overly alert or easily startled
- Feeling intense fear and anxiety, especially when exposed to situations, persons or stimuli that remind you of the trauma
- Feeling depressed, sad and lethargic
- Feeling hopelessness, despair and futility
- Difficulty focusing and concentrating and a feeling of being “scattered”
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty eating
- Difficulty remembering details
- Being emotionally detached from others

## Tips for Coping After a Traumatic Event

- **Settle your situation.** Remove yourself from environment in which the potential for further trauma or emotional duress exists.
- **Reach out to others for support.** Take comfort in the love and care of family and friends. Join a local support group for survivors of trauma.
- **Find an expert you can trust.** Ultimately, you should feel comfortable confiding in the therapist or counselor you choose.
- **Take care of your body and your mind.** Get plenty of rest. Take extra time off from work and other responsibilities. Eat right and exercise.
- **Avoid unhealthy coping behaviors.** Do not turn to drugs or alcohol to help you through this period. Find positive outlets and expressions, such as exercise, volunteer work or involvement in support groups, for your anxiety or stress.
- **Find healing through writing.** Many survivors find that keeping a journal and detailing their experiences through writing becomes a healthy, positive expression and coping technique. Try a daily gratitude journal, in which you jot down everything for which you feel grateful that day. It will take time to readjust and get back to normal after a traumatic event. Be patient during this period, and do not try to rush the healing process. There may be setbacks and emotional relapses along the journey. Do not ignore your feelings or what you are experiencing. Be honest with yourself and others. Make a commitment to learn from your experiences and turn difficult events into positive life lessons.

## Resources

For help and more tips on how to cope with a trauma or disaster, consider contacting these organizations:

- Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA): 301.231.9350 or [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)
- American Psychiatric Association: 888.357.7924 or [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org)
- Freedom From Fear (FFF): 718.351.1717 or [www.freedomfromfear.org](http://www.freedomfromfear.org)



**24/7 Live Assistance:**  
Call: 844.206.1127  
TRS: Dial 711



Online: [guidanceresources.com](http://guidanceresources.com)  
App: GuidanceNow<sup>SM</sup>  
Web ID: AldineISD

