



Coping with A SUDDEN TERRIBLE EVENT

What is a traumatic event?

Most of us at some point in our lives will experience a sudden, terrible, overwhelming event. The event or our reactions to it are called a trauma. The event might occur to us or to someone we know or care about, or it might be something we witness.

What are normal reactions?

Everyone reacts differently to a traumatic event, and many factors affect one's reactions – the nature of the event, one's past experiences, and culturally-based ways of coping and meaning-making. Trauma can shake us to our foundations. The following are some common and normal reactions:

Physical Reactions

- fatigue
- changes in sleeping patterns
- changes in eating patterns
- changes in other activity patterns
- digestive problems or stomachaches
- headaches or dizziness
- physical tension, shakiness, or
- weakness

Cognitive Reactions

- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty making decisions
- flashbacks or preoccupation with the event
- memory disturbances
- a sense that things aren't real

Emotional Reactions

- helplessness or meaninglessness
- numbness or hypersensitivity
- fear, panic, feeling unsafe
- moodiness, crying, or depression
- anger or guilt
- isolation from other people
- feeling that your thoughts and emotions are out of control
- neediness, not wanting to be alone

How can I cope?

- **Talking about the event** and listening to others talk about it are important ways of understanding and making sense of what happened. Find a context in which you are comfortable B one-to-one, with a group, or writing in a journal or a letter to a friend.
- As much as you can, **continue your usual routines**. It may feel meaningless or uncomfortable, because normal life may not feel so normal any more. But walk through your usual activities as well as you can.
- **Allow yourself time to react** to the event however you need to. If you need some time alone, take it. If you need to cry, go ahead. If you need company, seek it out.
- **Mental or physical activity can be very healing:** try taking a walk, exercising, writing in a journal, or reading.
- **Be aware of and avoid urges to numb your pain** with drugs or alcohol. If you are taking a prescription medication, continue to follow the usual instructions and contact your doctor if you feel a change is in order. If you are troubled by any of your physical, cognitive, or emotional reactions, or they do not begin to ease after several weeks, tell someone. **A parent, counselor, or advisor can support you in your efforts to cope.**