



## Traumatic Event Information Sheet

Even though a traumatic incident has concluded, you, or those around you, may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. For some this may occur a little after the event. It is very common, in fact quite normal for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have witnessed, or been involved in, what would be a traumatic incident.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after a traumatic incident. They may appear for a few days, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer. With the understanding and support of your family and loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly.

Occasionally, the traumatic incident is so painful that professional assistance from a psychologist may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular traumatic incident is too powerful to manage on your own. The professional's role is aimed to give people skills and knowledge to aid them in their recovery process.

The following provides a list of some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction:

### Physical

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Tremors         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling uncoordinated    | <input type="checkbox"/> Profuse sweating                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Chills          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhoea                | <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Rapid breathing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disturbances       | <input type="checkbox"/> Rapid heart beat (palpitations)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle aches    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased blood pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Chest pain (seek medical attention) |  |

### Thinking

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slowed thinking             | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty in problem-solving    | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty calculating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating    | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty making decisions      | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor attention span    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distressing dreams          | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty naming common objects | <input type="checkbox"/> Memory problems        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing the event repeatedly | <input type="checkbox"/> Disorientation (time & place)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion              |

### Emotional

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety           | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief             | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling lost       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling abandoned | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling numb/startled/shocked       | <input type="checkbox"/> Worry about others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wanting to hide   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wanting to limit social interaction | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger/irritability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling isolated  |  |   |

### You should seek help if:

- You are unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- You continue to feel numb and empty and do not have normal feelings
- You feel your emotions are not returning to normal over a period of time
- You continue to have physical symptoms
- You continue to have nightmares and disturbed sleep
- You have no person or group with whom to share your emotions
- Your relationships and work seem to be suffering or change as a result of the trauma
- You are having accidents and are increasing the use of alcohol or drugs

## Common Feelings and Reactions

The return to a "normal" lifestyle may be difficult after exposure to a traumatic incident. Everyone's reactions may not be the same. Some of the most common feelings experienced are:

### Shock

- Disbelief at what has happened
- Numbness, it may seem unreal (like a dream)
- No understanding of what has happened

### Fears

- Of damage to yourself, or death
- Of it happening again
- Awareness of personal vulnerability
- Panicky feelings
- Other apparently unrelated fears

### Anger

- At "who caused it" or "allowed it to happen"
- Outrage at what has happened
- At the injustice and senselessness of it all
- Generalized anger and irritability, and
- "why him/her?"
- "why me?"
- "why us?"

### Helplessness

- Crises show us how powerless we are at times as well as our strengths

### Sadness

- About human destruction and losses of every kind for
- loss of the belief that our world is safe and predictable

### Shame

- For having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others
- For not having reacted as one would have wished

### Guilt

- That some have not lost as much as others
- "if only I....."
- About how you behaved

**Expressing these common feelings allows nature to heal. The feelings usually only last for a short time and will lessen over the first few weeks. If they persist please seek professional support.**

## The Effects on Behaviour May be Expressed As:

### Tension

- More easily startled, general nervousness -physical or mental

### Sleep Disturbances

- Unable to sleep, thoughts that keep you awake

### Dreams and Nightmares

- Of the situation or other frightening events

### Memories and Feelings

- Interfere with concentration and daily life
- Flashbacks
- Attempts to shut them out which lead to deadening of feelings and thoughts

### Irritability

- Frequent swings in mood

### Depression

- About the event, past events or loss of personal effects

### Social Withdrawal

- A need to be alone

### Physical Sensations

- Tiredness
- Palpitations
- Tremors
- Breathing difficulties
- Headaches
- Tense muscles
- Aches and pains
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of sexual interest
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea or constipation and
- Many other symptoms

**Note:** Any of these symptoms may occur after months or years

These physical and emotional symptoms are **NORMAL**. They develop in people facing stress, threat or loss and are responses that help the person cope. They can be unpleasant and distressing.

## Helpful Hints

**By using some of the following hints, the emotional pain associated with a traumatic incident may be relieved.**

### For yourself

- Physical activity is often helpful
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel like it)
- Express your feelings as they arise
- Talk to people who love you
- Contact friends
- Have someone stay with you for at least a few hours or periods for a day or so
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them - they will decrease over time and become less painful
- Fight against boredom
- Stay away from alcohol and drugs, it will make things worse
- Try to keep a reasonable level of activity
- Try to rest a bit more
- Find a good counsellor if the feelings become prolonged or too intense

### For Family and Friends

- Listen carefully
- Be patient
- Spend time with the traumatized person
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for it
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Help them with everyday tasks
- Give them some private time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" - traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to assist them.