

Further support

You should seek help if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Constant nightmares and sleeping problems
- Flashbacks
- Avoidance of places and situations which remind you of the event
- Your work has started to suffer
- Your personal life has started to suffer
- You continue to bottle up your emotions, even though you need to talk to someone
- Reactions or feeling which have persisted for more than 4 weeks

To prevent the onset of secondary problems, you should seek professional help from:

- Your family doctor
- An independent psychiatrist/psychologist, a sociopsychiatric service or a psychiatric clinic
- Your local victim support and advice service
- Your local pastoral care provider

Tranquillizers and sleeping pills should not be taken within 48 hours of a traumatic event.

Further information

Contact the organisation which distributed this leaflet.
For more detailed information, go to www.nnpn.ch

Coping with a traumatic event

Information for trauma survivors and family members

Published by the Federal Office of Civil Protection (FOCP) and the Federation of Swiss Psychologists (FSP)

With assistance from the National Psychological First Aid Network (NNPN)

www.nnpn.ch

Have you or has someone close to you experienced a traumatic event? This leaflet contains some helpful and important advice.

Common reactions

If you have been involved in an exceptionally traumatic event, it is very common to have powerful reactions and feelings. These may last for days or even weeks. Eyewitnesses and rescue workers may also be affected.

The following reactions are normal and may persist for a few days:

- Tension, trembling, headaches, exhaustion, cardiovascular problems, sweating, nausea, lump in your throat;
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly, mentally reliving the event, heightened state of alert, flashbacks, nightmares;
- Worry, helplessness, grief, emotional outbursts, feelings of guilt, shame, anger and frustration, disappointment;
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, avoidance behaviour, increased irritability, loss of appetite, food cravings, restlessness, increased use of alcohol and other drugs, social withdrawal.

What can trauma survivors do?

It may help to ask for help from people you trust. Spending time with them or talking to them may provide some relief.

- Talk through your experiences with someone you trust.
- Take time to rest and recuperate.
- Eat as healthily as possible; avoid alcohol and other drugs.
- If you cannot shake off upsetting thoughts and images or start to feel tense, keep busy by doing things you liked to do prior to the event.
- Take time to mourn and work through your experiences. Don't put yourself under any undue pressure to immediately get back to "normal".
- Accept any offer of help from family and friends.
- Try to return to your daily routine as soon as you can. Structure your day and live as normal a life as possible.
- Resume your usual day-to-day activities and hobbies prior to the event, even though your interest in them has diminished.

Do not expect your memories of the event to disappear over time. It will take a while to come to terms with what has happened.

What about my children?

Children commonly have the following feelings and reactions:

- General unease;
- Reliving the trauma over and over again;
- Irritability, wanting to be alone;
- Anxious behaviour, fear of separation and of the dark.

What can family and friends do?

Sympathy from family and friends can greatly help trauma survivors cope with their distressing experience. The simple fact of not feeling alone may also provide some relief.

- Spend time with the person. Offer support or listen even if (s)he has not asked you for help.
- Listen when the person is ready to talk. Sometimes it helps to recount what happened.
- Help the person structure his/her days directly after the event in order to prevent them from dwelling on his/her experience.
- Respect the person's privacy and allow him/her to withdraw, where necessary.
- After certain events, some activities must be organised and carried out differently. Practical support can be particularly helpful. Generally speaking, however, it is important that the person is given help to resume his/her normal day-to-day life as soon as possible and to cope independently.
- Let your children talk about their feelings, or express them through play and art. They should return to school and resume their normal activities as soon as possible.

Trauma survivors may display anger or aggressive behaviour - don't take it personally.