



Coping with Trauma

Trauma is a sudden painful event that dramatically impacts our ordinary life, and changes the way we see the world. This might include the illness of a close family member, a car accident, an assault or other threatening events. It is normal to feel shocked and somewhat distressed following any event that is not in the 'normal' range of human experience. Remember, it is the situation or circumstances that are 'abnormal,' not you.

Emotional reactions to trauma

It is very common for someone who has experienced trauma to have these feelings and symptoms after such an event:

Helplessness – You may feel you are no longer in control of your life or your feelings. You may experience repeated memories of the event and feel that you cannot control your thoughts.

Sadness – You may frequently feel like bursting into tears.

Anger – You may experience anger at what has happened, and at whatever caused it or allowed it to happen. This may be tied to a sense of injustice, or a sense that others do not properly understand.

Guilt – You may experience guilt as a result of things that you did or did not do, or through feeling better off than those who were more personally involved in the incident.

If you've gone through a traumatic event, remind yourself that it is normal to feel the way you do.

If you're feeling suicidal or in crisis, please call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. You can also chat at 988lifeline.org.





Physical reactions to trauma

You may also experience the following physical reactions:

- Constant tension, headaches and muscle pain
- Restlessness
- Poor concentration; for example, making more mistakes, taking longer to do everyday tasks, or more frequent daydreaming
- Feeling 'foggy' and numb
- Sleeplessness – you may notice changes in the pattern of your normal sleep routine; for example, difficulty in getting to sleep, early morning waking or nightmares.
- Flashbacks to the incident, which can be triggered by smells and noises
- Excessive jumpiness, including sensitivity to loud noises or sudden movements, particularly if they remind you of the incident itself.
- Loss of appetite

Behavioral reactions to trauma

You may also notice changes in behavior such as the following:

- Fear of returning to the area where the traumatic event took place
- A desire to isolate yourself and avoid talking to other people
- Feeling sensitive to reminders of the incident and avoiding media coverage or other things which make you think of the incident.
- Loss of interest in things you previously enjoyed doing, or in socializing
- A change in libido
- A loss of interest in your daily routine
- Reduced confidence in yourself and belief in your ability to cope
- Increased levels of irritability
- A tendency to drink more alcohol

What can you do?

If you've gone through a traumatic event, remind yourself that it is normal to feel the way you do. Talk about the incident to other people who were involved or others who have shared similar experiences. Talk over the facts and emotions concerning the incident with close friends or loved ones. Be cautious about excessive alcohol use as a coping mechanism. Be aware of over-activity as sometimes it can be detrimental when it diverts attention from the help you need for yourself. This can quickly get out of control. Sometimes it also helps to talk to someone outside your family who knows how to help in a crisis situation; for example, a primary healthcare provider or a church or faith community.

Need additional help?

If after a month or longer your reactions are getting worse rather than improving, you may need to seek additional assistance. For example:

- If you're feeling that you cannot experience happiness, joy, love or other positive emotions
- If you are taking less interest in things you used to enjoy
- If you are having difficulty imagining the future
- If you continue to avoid places and people that remind you of the incident

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- You continue to have nightmares, poor sleep and/or other forms of stress and anxiety
- If your relationships seem to be suffering or sexual problems develop
- If you continue to smoke or drink to excess following the event
- If your work performance suffers
- If, as a helper, you are suffering exhaustion

Additional symptoms you may experience

While these symptoms may feel unrelated, they can be related to your trauma:

- You find yourself getting more angry or having outbursts and you normally do not do this
- You cannot concentrate well and have to push yourself to work harder to get things done
- You find yourself becoming forgetful and absent minded
- You are experiencing unaccustomed physical pains, aches or clumsiness
- You find it harder and harder to be with people and want to stay in places that feel 'safe'
- You lack confidence and self esteem after the traumatic event

General advice

- Focus on your need for rest and relaxation – soothing activities allow for mental and physical recovery.
- Stay in contact with those closest to you. Contact can help you avoid the loneliness many feel after trauma.
- Try to get back into a normal routine as much as possible.
- Try not to avoid the memories completely. Complete avoidance of the memories and experience can harm the process of recovery.
- Share your feelings with others.
- Be careful doing things that require concentration, like driving or household tasks, until you feel your ability to concentrate return.
- Remember this is a passing phase; with time, the majority of people make a full recovery.



Helpful Idaho resources

If you need additional help, seek advice from your healthcare provider.

If you need immediate crisis help, you can call or text the National and Idaho Suicide & Crisis Helpline at **988**, or chat at **988lifeline.org**. Someone is available to help you 24/7.



2-1-1 Idaho Careline: Dial **211** or **1-800-926-2588** or text **898211** to speak with a resource specialist for health and human services available in your community.

Optum Idaho's 24/7 Member Access and Crisis Line: **1-855-202-0973** (TDD/TTY services at **711** for the hearing impaired) or visit **optumidaho.com**.