

Coping through traumatic events

A traumatic event, whether an act of violence or terrorism, a disaster, or an accident, turns life upside down. It can cause severe stress reactions, while affecting survivors, rescue workers, and loved ones of victims. A traumatic event may also impact the people who witnessed it indirectly or through the media. Whatever the nature of the event, individuals' experience and reactions to it will be unique to them.

Normal Reactions to Trauma

Traumatic events have a way of changing a person's perspective, assumptions, and expectations of life. They can leave people feeling shocked, saddened, and vulnerable. It is important to remember that these are normal reactions to an abnormal and unexpected event. Understanding one's response after a traumatic event may help an individual cope better. The following are common emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical reactions to stress. A person may experience some or all reactions, and even some experiences not included here. An individual may immediately feel strong emotions or not notice a change until later.

Your benefits with Spring Health

Spring Health—your mental wellness benefit provided by your employer—can help you work through any difficult feelings you may be experiencing. It's 100% confidential, so your info will never be shared with your employer or anyone else.

[Sign up](#) or [sign in](#) to speak with your Care Navigator, a licensed clinician who can answer questions, book same-week therapy appointments, and more.





Emotional Reactions

- Shock
- Numbness
- Anxiety, depression, and sadness
- Guilt for being better off than others who survived the event
- Fear of returning to where the incident took place or another occurrence
- Uncertainty of feelings
- Feeling lost or abandoned
- Feeling overwhelmed

Cognitive Reactions

- Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
- Confusion
- Memory loss
- Shortened attention span
- Unwanted memories
- Indecisiveness

Behavioral Reactions

- Irritability or argumentative
- Withdrawal
- Suspicion
- Inappropriate humor
- Loss of interest in family, friends, or daily routine
- Change in sexual interest
- Increased consumption of nicotine, alcohol, and drugs
- Increased or decreased eating patterns

Physical Reactions

- Headaches, nausea, stomach pains, tightness in the chest, muscle pain—generally feeling unwell
- Listlessness and feeling tired
- Increased sensitivity to noise or people
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, edginess
- Loss of appetite
- Tremors
- Disturbed sleep or upsetting thoughts, dreams, and nightmares

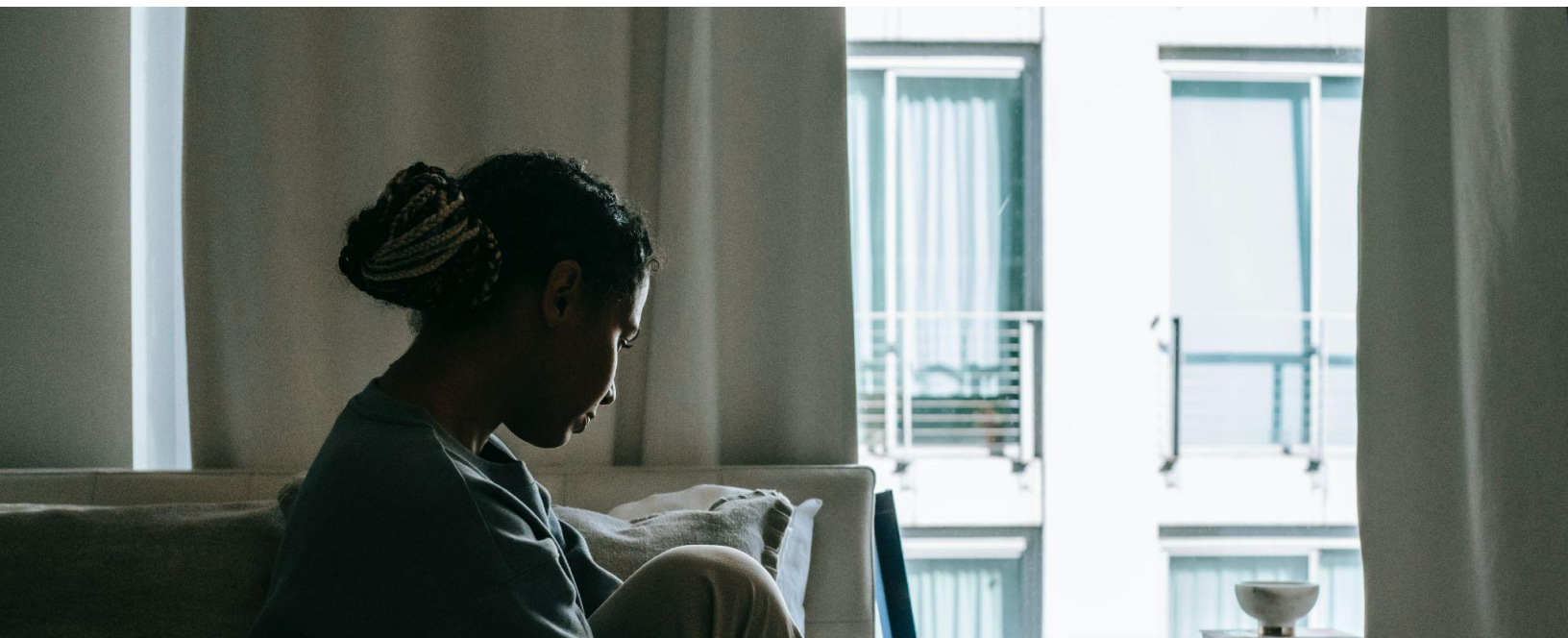




Coping Strategies

Here are some things that can help you cope and heal.

- Understand that everyone reacts differently to trauma. It's OK if one person's response is different from someone else's.
- Give yourself time and permission to feel out of sorts, anxious, or sad. Having gone through an ordeal, people will have good and bad days. That's part of the healing process.
- Get plenty of rest, nourishment, and exercise (can be a simple walk). Focus on relaxing rather than stressful activities.
- Maintain a usual routine. Helps to feel productive and have a sense of control.
- Be more careful around the house and while driving. Accidents are more common after a severely stressful event.
- Express needs and emotions clearly and honestly. Reach out to someone who is a good listener and nonjudgmental.
- Accept support and help from caring family and friends.
- Resolve day-to-day conflicts so they don't build up and add to feelings of stress.
- Help other people in the community as a volunteer.
- Don't attempt to numb the pain with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, or coffee.
- Don't bottle things up. Talk, cry, share thoughts, write them in a journal—whatever works.
- Don't dwell on media reports on the tragedy. Limit time around the sights and sounds of what happened.
- Don't make big life changes or snap decisions until fully recovered from the event.





When to Seek Extra Support

Sometimes the stress can be too big to handle alone. If experiencing any of the following, an individual should consider seeking additional support:

- Inability to take care of self or children
- Continuing to feel numb, tense, confused, or exhausted
- Feeling sad or depressed for more than 2 weeks
- Inability to handle intense feelings, emotions, or bodily reactions
- Continuing to have nightmares and a poor sleeping pattern
- Smoking, drinking, or taking drugs to excess
- Thinking about suicide
- Continuing to make mistakes or have accidents
- Realizing that work performance and relationships are suffering
- Having no one with whom to share emotions, and feeling the need to do so

Where to Go for Extra Support

- A mental health counselor
- A clergy person
- Your employee assistance program (EAP)
- Local support groups
- A suicide prevention hotline

References:

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Updated 2009, February 20). Coping with a traumatic event. Retrieved July 9, 2014, from <http://www.bt.cdc.gov>

Sulaski, C. (Reviewed 2016). Individual's reactions to traumatic events. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Get confidential support:

[Benefits.springhealth.com](https://benefits.springhealth.com)

1-855-629-0554

(Select option 2 for 24/7 crisis support)

