

Coping with crisis

Anyone who experiences a crisis or trauma is caught up in a horrible event which disrupts everyday life in a way which is overwhelming and distressing. You, a relative or a friend may just have been through such a traumatic experience and be wondering what is happening to you.

This leaflet has been designed to provide information, support and guidance. Its purpose is to help you understand what you are going through, how you can help yourself and, when necessary, how you can seek the help of others.

In the immediate aftermath and during the early weeks following the trauma, it is likely you will experience a wide range of different feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations. These are quite usual in the unusual circumstances.

Normal feelings and emotions

- Numbness, a sense of being in a dream or cut off from what is happening.
- Anger, at what has happened, the senselessness and injustice.
- Guilt, for having survived when others died or were hurt, for not having done more to help.
- Shame, for being weak and emotional, for not being brave.
- Grief, for the death of loved ones, for the loss of what makes life precious.

- Helplessness, for being caught up in a situation which is beyond your control.

Normal physical reactions

- Disturbed sleep patterns, vivid dreams and nightmares.
- Flashbacks – intrusive images, sounds, sensations, smells, reminders of the event.
- Being easily startled or “jumpy”.
- Avoiding situations which trigger memories of the event.
- Loss of concentration and poor memory.
- Anxiety sensations – dizziness, breathlessness, panic attacks.
- Irritability and tearfulness.

Remember although these reactions are intense and distressing they are the usual responses after trauma. They are part of the recovery process and they usually diminish with time.

Some “do’s and don’ts”

DO

- Try to keep your life and usual routines as normal as possible.
- Eat regularly, take exercise and relax if you can.
- Share your feelings and emotions.
- Take care of your physical and emotional needs – sleep, rest, think, share and talk.

- Take more general care of yourself especially when driving – accidents are more common after trauma.
- Be patient with yourself and allow time to recover – although you want to get back to being your old self this will not happen overnight.

DON'T

- Bottle up your feelings – express them and let others share with you.
- Cut yourself off from family.
- Make any major life changes at this time.
- Increase your alcohol consumption.
- Rely on alcohol or other non-prescribed drugs to blot out painful memories.
- Take on more than you think you can cope with.

Human beings are resourceful and resilient. Most people recover and rebuild their lives. However it is possible that some people take longer to get over the trauma and will require additional specialist help. If after three to six months you are still experiencing any of the following symptoms it is time to seek further help:

- Persistent sleep disturbance with dreams and nightmares.
- Recurrent flashbacks and images.
- Feeling numb and cut off from your feelings.
- Avoiding situations and reminders of the event.
- Withdrawal and loss of interest in family life and social activities.

- Lack of interest in your partner and sexual feelings.
- Mood swings, panic attacks, depression and anxiety.
- Increase in consumption of alcohol.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Contact your GP who will be able to offer further advice and information and referral to specialist treatment services.

Confidential help is also available from:

Mental Health Matters

0800 107 0160

(Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week offering confidential emotional support & Guidance for the people of Kent).

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

CRUSE

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Day by Day Helpline Tel: 0844 477 9400

Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

NHS Direct

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Tel: 0845 4647

Victim Support

www.victimsupport.org.uk

0845 30 30 900

Disaster Action

www.disasteraction.org.uk

01483 799066

HELPING CHILDREN WHO ARE INVOLVED IN TRAUMATIC EVENTS

It is quite common for children to be reluctant to share their emotions with adults, as they are afraid of upsetting them. For this reason it is not always immediately apparent to adults that children are distressed and suffering emotionally. Adults should not simply assume that because children are not showing any adverse reactions this means they are not affected. Pay particular attention if a child's sleep becomes disturbed, if they lose concentration or if they become "clingy" and anxious.

Encourage children to talk and share their emotions with their friends so they can gain support from those in their own age group. It is important for adults to provide reassurance, security and routine. Keep any further disruptions to a minimum and help the child to feel safe. Be available to talk and comfort. Open, thoughtful communication with children will be of most benefit.

If you are a parent who has been bereaved during the traumatic incident you may find it too difficult to talk about your own feelings and your grief may be too great for you to provide the support and comfort your child needs. In this situation see if you can find another adult your child trusts to help you in meeting their needs.

COPING WITH CRISIS

A GUIDE FOR ADULTS

Reading it may help you to understand some of your feelings and, just as important, understand what others around you may be feeling

Kent Resilience Forum



PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES IN KENT AND MEDWAY