

Coping with crisis

Feeling distressed

Anyone exposed to an event such as a sudden death, terrorist attack or natural disaster may feel emotional effects. These responses are normal and are the mind's way of trying to make sense and come to terms with what has happened.

Depending on your experience, your response in the first few weeks might include feeling afraid, sad, helpless, overwhelmed, angry, confused, numb or disorientated. Distressing thoughts and images can pop into your head. You may have disturbed sleep, insomnia or have nightmares.

Feeling anxious and in a low mood is normal.

Coping

The most helpful way of coping with such an event is to be with people you feel close to and normally spend time with.

Cry if you need to. Letting feelings out is helpful in the long run. Ask for emotional and practical help from friends, family, your community or religious centre.

Although it may be difficult, try to return to everyday routines and habits, as they can be comforting. Look after yourself – try to eat and sleep well, exercise and relax.

Everyone's different

For each person who experiences a traumatic event there will be factors which make a difference to their reactions. Whilst there are patterns which can be expected, this does not mean everyone will experience the effects at the same time.

NORMAL FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE

Some or many of these symptoms may be experienced by those involved in an event such as an accident, terrorist bombing or natural disaster.

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- Fear, for yourself or others.
- Tearfulness, feeling more emotional than normal.
- Intensified reactions, e.g. feeling unexplainably angry about something with which you would normally be slightly irritated.
- Disturbed sleep patterns.
- Nightmares.
- Feelings of isolation, feeling that others do not understand.
- Anxiety attacks, feeling panic stricken or helpless.
- Flashbacks, the reliving of an experience, triggered by certain sights, sounds or smells.
- Lack of concentration.
- Feelings of shame or guilt.
- Why me?

These reactions are normal, and with time should fade. For some it may be helpful to meet with others who have shared the experience, or to seek support in examining these emotions.

For a number of those involved, statistics show between 5% and 25%, the effects may result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, where the symptoms mentioned above may be more concentrated and longer lasting.

If in doubt an assessment can be made by a Clinical Psychologist, who can be accessed through a referral from your Doctor or Health Centre.