

**PHC**

Petaluma Health Center  
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## **TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AFTER A TRUMATIC EVENT**

Everyone who is in any way involved with a disaster or traumatic event may experience trauma reactions. You might experience these reactions if you:

- ◆ Were a witness or were involved in the event
- ◆ Arrived upon the scene of the event
- ◆ Had a “near miss” or were almost involved in the event
- ◆ Knew or know others who were killed, harmed, or involved in some way
- ◆ **Have a relationship with family or friends of victims.**
- ◆ **Are reminded of other traumatic incidents in your life by this event.**

It is important to remember that trauma reactions are normal reactions to extremely abnormal circumstances. It is difficult to predict what type of trauma reactions you will experience following a disastrous event. It is important to allow yourself permission to have your reactions, and take care of them both by yourself and by asking for help from others, as best you can. Many people find it helpful to have information about what constitutes a typical reaction to trauma.

## **TYPICAL REACTIONS TO TRAUMA**

Not everyone experiences the same set of responses to trauma, but people typically experience reacts that fall into four basic categories. Here are some reacts that you may be experiencing:

### **Psychological and Emotional**

- ◆ Heightened anxiety or fear
- ◆ Irritability, restlessness, or over excitability
- ◆ Feelings of sadness, moodiness, ore crying then usual
- ◆ Feeling of helplessness or hopelessness
- ◆ Felling of numbness or detachment
- ◆ “Survivor guilt”, or feeling of self-blame that you escaped the tragedy
- ◆ Re-experiencing of traumatic event, possibly including:
  - Intrusive thought or images of the event
  - Distressing dreams or nightmares

- Flashbacks about the event
- Distress when exposed to events that remind you of trauma
- ◆ Feelings of estrangement or isolation from others
- ◆ Hypervigilance (feelings especially attuned to events around you, scanning environment for possible danger)

## **TYPICAL REACTION TO TRAUMA**

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|-------------|--|
| Cognitive:  | Difficulty concentrating<br>Feeling confused or distracted, slower thought than normal   |
| Physical:   | Headaches<br>Nausea or upset stomach<br>Exaggerated startle response (tendency to startle easily at loud noises)<br>Fatigue or feeling slowed down   |
| Behavioral: | Hyperactivity, or less activity<br>Heightened tendency to behave irritably<br>Withdrawal, social isolation<br>Avoidance of activities or places that remind you of traumatic event<br>Insomnia or sleeping excessively<br>Strong need to talk about the event, read accounts about the event |

You may recognize yourself as experiencing some of the above reactions. Remember that your response is normal. Immediately following a traumatic event you will probably feel disrupted, dazed, and somewhat confused. You will notice that you are not behaving as you typically would. It is important to take care of yourself as best you can. Here are some self-care suggestions for you.

## **SELF CARE**

1. Keep reminding yourself that your responses are normal responses to a stressful situation. Give yourself permission to do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. Your body and mind will tell you what you need to do – your job is to listen to them.
2. Get plenty of rest when you're tired, and use the energy you have if you experience hyperactivity at times. Don't force yourself to be active if you don't have the energy, or rest when you don't feel tired.
3. Talk to people as much as you need to. Reach out. You may experience a need to talk repetitively about the trauma. If you can find someone who is willing to

listen, use her/him to talk to about how you are feeling. If you don't have anyone in your support network to use, talk to your medical provider or behavioral health consultant who can refer you to someone.

4. Spend time with others, even if you don't feel like talking. It can be very comfortable to know you're not alone. Try to find someone or someplace that feels safe and comforting to you, and spend time there.
5. Don't make any major life decision or big life changes if at all possible. This is not a time to put pressure on yourself to do anything out of the ordinary. Concentrate on taking care of yourself.
6. Do things that feel good to you – take baths, read, exercise, watch television, spend time with friends and family, fix yourself a special treat, or whatever else feels nurturing and self caring.
7. Allow yourself to cry, rage, and express your feeling when you need to. Try not to numb your feelings with alcohol or drugs. This will only complicate your situation.

## **THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY**

It is important to know that recovering from a trauma is a process that may take a long time. The initial response of disruption (perhaps alternating with numbness) may last days, weeks, or longer. Don't be surprised if you continue to experience these reactions for longer than your expected. It is impossible to predict how long you will experience effects of the trauma, but usually trauma reactions gradually decrease over time. If you experience another stressful event while recovering from trauma, you may find that your trauma reactions reappear for a while. This re-activation, or delayed trauma response, is perfectly normal.

At any time during this process, you may find it useful to ask for professional help form a counselor or mental health professional. There are some circumstances under which you should definitely get professional help:

- ◆ If you find yourself feeling suicidal or contemplating suicide
- ◆ If you find that your daily function continues to be impaired so that you cannot carry out your life tasks.
- ◆ If you post-trauma fears interfere with your ability to return to certain places or situations that remind you of the trauma.

## CUIDADO DE USTED MISMO

1. Recuerdese a sí mismo que sus respuestas son respuestas normales a una situación estresante. Dése permiso de hacer todo lo necesario para poder cuidar de usted mismo. Su cuerpo y mente le van a decir qué es lo que usted necesita hacer – es su trabajo el escuchar a esta voz interna y hacerle caso.
2. Dése el lujo de descansar lo suficiente cuando se sienta cansado, y use la energía que le queda cuando experimente momentos de hiperactividad. No se fuerce a sí mismo a estar activo cuando usted no sienta tener la energía para ello; tampoco le sugerimos ponerse a descansar cuando no se sienta cansado.
3. Platicue con gente todo lo que sienta necesario. Busque a otros. Usted puede experimentar la necesidad de hablar repetidas veces acerca del evento traumático. Si puede encontrar a alguien que está dispuesto a escucharle, úselo para platicarle acerca de cómo se está sintiendo. Si no tiene a nadie en su entorno social con quien pueda hablar, platicue con su médico o psicólogo (consultor conductual de la salud), quienes le podrán referir a alguien para platicar del tema.
4. Pase tiempo con otras personas, aún cuando no sienta deseos de platicar. Puede ser muy reconfortante saber que usted no está sólo/sola. Trate de encontrar a alguien o algún lugar que le haga sentirse a salvo y cómodo. Pase tiempo en ese lugar/con esa persona.
5. Si es posible, después del evento traumático, le sugerimos que no tome ninguna decisión mayor ni haga grandes cambios en su vida. Este no es el momento de que usted se deba presionar a sí mismo a hacer algo fuera de lo común. Concéntrese más bien en cuidar de usted mismo.
6. Haga cosas que le hagan sentirse bien a usted – tome baños, lea, haga ejercicio, vea televisión, pase tiempo con sus amigos y familia, prepárese un premio/dulce/postre especial, o haga cualquier otra cosa que le haga a usted sentirse querido, protegido y cuidado.
7. Permitase llorar, gritar, rabiar y expresar sus sentimientos cuando sienta necesidad de hacerlo. Trate de no entumecer sus sentimientos con alcohol o drogas. Estas sólo van a complicar más aún su situación.

## EL PROCESO DE LA RECUPERACION

Es importante saber que la recuperación del trauma es un proceso que puede tomar mucho tiempo. La respuesta inicial de distracción o interrupción a su forma normal de ser (tal vez alternándose con entumecimiento emocional) puede durar algunos días, semanas o más tiempo. No se sorprenda si usted continúa experimentando estas reacciones por más tiempo de lo esperado. Es imposible predecir durante cuánto tiempo usted experimentará efectos del trauma, sin embargo, las reacciones al trauma gradualmente se decrementan o disminuyen con el tiempo. Si usted experimenta un segundo evento estresante durante la etapa en que se está recuperando del trauma, puede suceder que las reacciones consecuentes al trauma reaparezcan por un tiempo. Esto se conoce como re-activación o respuesta retrasada al trauma, y es algo perfectamente normal.

En cualquier momento durante este proceso de recuperación, usted puede encontrar útil el solicitar ayuda profesional como lo es el tener una cita con un consultor de la salud o con

un profesional de la salud mental. Tome en cuenta que hay ciertas circunstancias por las que usted definitivamente debería obtener ayuda de un profesional:

- ◆ Si usted empieza a tener sentimientos suicidas o si empieza a contemplar el suicidio como una opción.
- ◆ Si usted siente que su funcionamiento diario continúa siendo afectado a tal grado que usted es incapaz de llevar a cabo sus responsabilidades y tareas diarias.
- ◆ Si sus temores post-traumáticos interfieren con su capacidad de regresar a ciertos lugares o situaciones que le recuerden dicho trauma.