

Personal Coping after a Stressful Event

Thinking about our personal coping techniques is important when stressful events touch our lives. Just the changes in our daily routines can be anxiety producing. Listed below are some normal reactions to such an event and suggestions on how to take care of yourself if you are exposed to one:

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| Fatigue | Bothersome memories | Feeling on edge or jumpy |
| Anxiety | Crying | Feeling confused |
| Sleep disturbance | Guilt | Physical sensations |
| Nightmares | Anger or irritability | |
| Trouble concentrating | Fear or worry | |
| Flashbacks of the event | | |

All these feelings and reactions are normal and natural responses to a stressful event. Even though they may seem unusual, they do not alone suggest anything is wrong in the hours and days after an event. It is also normal to have no reactions; they may come later, or not at all. We are all individuals. We all cope and respond in our own ways. Most reactions will subside within 1-2 weeks.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind:

- **Nurture good connections** to those you care about. Spend time with people who support you. They can be comforting and help you to sit with uncomfortable emotions, or help you return to things you enjoy or find healthy comforts.
- **Use stress management strategies** such as exercise, quiet time, getting enough sleep and remembering to do pleasant activities that give you a break from information about the event.
- **Make active decisions** about when and for how long to listen to media reports. Watching stressful events over and over alone can make people anxious: it is OK to limit time watching or turn it off, and especially advised if young children are in the home. Filter the flood of news from all its sources including radio, TV and the internet.
- **Return to your regular routines** like work, exercise, hobbies and home activities. Routines can be calming and reassuring. Even if at first it is hard to return to things that might remind us of stressful events, they become easier over time if we don't avoid them.
- **Eat well-balanced and regular meals** (try even if you don't feel like it.)
- **Express your feelings** with supportive people in your life when you want to. Everyone copes their own way. Be in charge of when you talk about the events. It is okay to say, "I don't feel like talking about it right now."
- **Be optimistic about challenges ahead.** Stay in touch with your sources of hope, and spiritual strength and renewal (nature, prayer, yoga, meditation, etc.).
- **Don't use alcohol as a way to numb your stress.** This can interfere with healthy recovery and lead to too much drinking.
- **Recognize when you need help.** The memory may always be part of your life. Everyone moves at his or her own pace of healing after a major stress. If emotions feel overwhelming, if you have trouble focusing at or going to work, if you can't sleep because of memories, fear or nightmares, or if you feel anxiety that is not improving, then consider getting assistance.