



## How to Cope with Traumatic Events in the Community

Community traumas such as natural disasters, violent acts, or other shocking events often happen without warning and take people by surprise. Trauma can also occur in response to chronic stressors like racial discrimination. Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to abnormal events. Actual involvement in the event is not always a pre-requisite for experiencing traumatic stress; people may experience it by just witnessing a highly distressing incident or having a close family member or friend experience such a situation.

People commonly experience a variety of emotions and physical reactions after exposure to trauma. Reactions after a traumatic event or incidents may vary from person to person and community to community. These might include:

- Sadness
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Irritability
- Inability to focus
- Disruption of sleep patterns
- A change in eating habits
- Relationship issues
- Nightmares and flashbacks
- General negativity
- Avoiding anything with an emotional or physical connection to the trauma
- Nervousness
- Trouble functioning



## How to Help Yourself

Here are a few things that may be of benefit:

- **Accept help and support from your loved ones.** Lean on family and friends for support. Talk to them about your feelings if you're comfortable doing so and accept their help with daily tasks and obligations if it's offered.
- **Look after yourself.** Take care of the basics like proper nutrition, rest, and exercise. Also, try to find the time to immerse yourself in other relaxing pursuits like meditation, art, music, and nature.
- **Limit exposure to media** It may be tempting to read and watch news regarding the event. Be mindful of how this exposure impacts you. If it increases your anxiety/ sadness/ etc. (which is very common) limit your exposure to media regarding the event.
- **Come to terms with how you feel.** Avoiding properly addressing your feelings is a fairly normal reaction, but in time it may end up prolonging your stress. Take time to purposefully address your feeling about the event. If it feels daunting to address your feelings on your own consider enlisting the support of a mental health professional.

- **Participate in community programs** to address the impact of the event. Connecting with and helping others can be helpful.
- **Embrace the familiar** Sometimes there is comfort and reassurance in old routines and habits. This can apply both to home and work.
- **Be patient.** Getting back to normal is going to take time, but no one knows exactly how much time. Be patient; as the days pass, your symptoms should start to gradually improve.
- **Build your team** If you need additional support, ask for it. People may think you don't need support unless you let them know that you do. Explore your support options. Your employee assistance program has many resources that can be helpful.

## How to Help Others

If someone around you, whether it's a friend, family member, or coworker, is coping with a traumatic event there are ways you can support them.

- **Be available** Reach out and let them know you're there if needed. Some people might want to talk, some might just want to sit in silence. Be there for them either way.
- **Be reassuring** Make it clear that the way they are feeling is normal and understandable
- **Extend an invitation** If there is an event/ ceremony to remember or aid victims of the tragedy, inviting your friend, loved one, or coworker may be a way to help them combat emotional isolation and be around people dealing with the same issues as them.

