



Post-traumatic stress

Understand the facts

A traumatic event is any unusual occurrence that causes prolonged disruption to normal physical and cognitive functioning of an individual, group or organization. Disasters, whether natural or human-caused, can be life-altering and psychologically-scarring. It is important to know that these reactions are normal and temporary. The challenge is to know how to cope and adapt so that we can resume our activities of daily life. With some people, post-traumatic stress, left untreated, can lead to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).



Reactions to trauma

- **Physical responses:** changes in sleep patterns, change in appetite, rapid breathing, dizziness, headaches, muscle tension, increased heart rate, stomach upset.
- **Emotional responses:** shock or numbness, anger toward others involved, fear, depression, guilt or frustration, sadness, feeling unsafe or vulnerable, loneliness.
- **Mental responses:** confusion, difficulty concentrating, difficulty remembering details of event.
- **Behavioural responses:** withdrawal from others, angry outbursts, crying, irritability, decreased energy or ambition, marital or relationship conflict, increased use of alcohol or medications.



Self-care

- Care for yourself: eat well, exercise and get enough rest.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine and depressants, such as alcohol.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with those who are supportive and helpful.
- Seek out comfortable, familiar surroundings and avoid spending too much time alone.
- Do not be anxious if reactions from past traumas re-emerge even though you may have felt those issues were resolved.
- Give yourself time to recover.
- Remember that difficulty sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks and feelings of being “hyper-alert” are common and will diminish over time.
- Do not compare or measure your



Self-care (continued)

- Remember that difficulty sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks and feelings of being “hyper-alert” are common and will diminish over time.
- Do not compare or measure your reactions to those of other people – each individual’s experience is unique and personal.
- Communicate your feelings clearly.
- Know that anniversary dates or a specific holiday may trigger feelings related to the trauma. This is normal.
- Keep a journal.



Reach out

- Contact the [Employee Assistance Program](#) for free, confidential counseling services.
- Talk to a counselor who has experience with critical incident response or disaster mental health counseling.
- Support groups can connect you with others who have faced a similar situation.



Need more information?

- Beyond Blue:
www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety/types-of-anxiety/ptsd.
- National Institute of Mental Health:
www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml.