

Common Responses After Traumatic Events

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – PTSD is a mental health condition that can be caused by any kind of deep emotional and, in some cases, unanticipated trauma. People who experience PTSD often feel shattered-like they will never feel normal again-and different from everyone else.

Emotional numbness and withdrawal – The pain and horror of the crime may be too intense and the people around you probably don't understand what's going on inside you.

Sleep disturbances – Dreams, nightmares, and insomnia are frequent following trauma.

Flashbacks and “trigger events” – Certain sounds, smells, situations, images, or stories can act as triggers that take you back to the crime you encountered.

Depression - Depression can leave you feeling sad and exhausted making it hard for you to engage in such simple activities as getting out of bed, bathing, and eating. It's not uncommon to experience a sense of helplessness, hopelessness or even feel suicidal.

Loss of interest in physical and sexual intimacy – Lost interest in physical and sexual connections with others is common after trauma.

Faith Crisis – Trauma can challenge and compromise your spiritual beliefs. You may wonder how God could allow this catastrophe to happen to you. Questioning belief systems is very common among survivors of violent crime. Your anger may not be displaced and can be part of your search for a new understanding.

Hyper-vigilance – If you have experienced sleepless nights in which you have to get up and “do something” or find yourself having a hard time sitting still then you maybe hyper-vigilant. Your mind and body want to stay alert to any possible threat, real or imagined.

Using drugs or alcohol as a means of escape – The stress and anxiety following a violent crime can be overwhelming. You may be tempted to turn to substances as a means to relax and receive some short-term relief from PTSD. However, alcohol and illicit drugs tend to numb you to your reality and can make the healing process even more difficult.

How To Manage Your Responses to Traumatic Events

Here are some suggestions that can help you to feel better and renew a sense of order and control in your life. A helpful acronym to help you to remember these resiliency strategies is **E.A.R.N.E.S.T.**:

Exercise aerobically on a daily basis. You don't have to train for a marathon. A brisk walk, bicycle ride or maybe a Zumba class, if you're able, will help you to rebuild body strength and regain a sense of control in your life that you may have lost after the crime,

Recreational activities are very helpful to reducing stress and anxiety. Find a hobby and pursue your passion. Now is a great time to indulge yourself in an activity that brings you comfort and satisfaction.

Nutrition plays a vital role in your recovery after trauma. Reduce the amount of sugar, salt, and other additives in your diet. Increase your intake of fresh fruits, lean meats, and fish. Increase your water intake also. Proper hydration speeds healing. Instead of eating three larger meals per day, consider eating five-six smaller meals daily, including healthy snacks. Maintaining healthy blood sugar levels not only improves your physical health but will also improve your mood. If you're not sure what to eat, schedule a consultation with a nutritionist, dietician, or your primary care physician.

Educate yourself on trauma reactions and make a conscious effort to explore healthy options to reduce the levels of stress and anxiety in your life. Think about what you need to regain your sense of stability and purpose for your life.

Spiritually is a wonderful and effective stress reducer. Daily prayer, meditation, journaling, even yoga, can help you to refocus your errant thoughts and gain a fresh perspective on your trauma experience. Talk to someone you can trust about faith and spiritual matters, someone who will not offer you trite answers to your questions or placate you with patronizing expressions of faith.

Talk about your experience and let people know how you're feeling. Don't isolate yourself. Talk to people who will be supportive and will listen to you without judgment. Consider turning your catastrophe into advocacy – but not as a substitute for recovery. You can't outrun your grief. Take the time to heal at your own pace and then reach out to others who may benefit from hearing your story.