

Resources for Dealing With Stress and Trauma

Events such as the recent attack made on our country cause varying degrees of stress and trauma for many individuals. Such events can have a significant impact due to the nature of the event itself, and/or they can trigger other trauma previously experienced by the individual.

After being involved in an intense, unusual, or abnormal event, an individual may experience reactions that are out of the ordinary for them. The event may create a stress response, which can result in changes in a person's usual physical or emotional reactions. Although these reactions are often unfamiliar and frightening, they are frequently normal. Often these reactions appear immediately after the event, but they may appear hours, weeks, or months later.

This pamphlet is designed as an informational resource tool for you to use with those in your ministry that may be experiencing either stress or trauma from recent events. The information contained in this pamphlet is not exhaustive, but is designed to provide you basic, fundamental information that you can utilize with those who might seek your assistance.

For additional information on stress and trauma, or to obtain information about the counseling resources we can offer, feel free to contact us at (303) 593-0575, or access our website at www.drtrathen.com.

Normal Crisis Reactions and Symptoms

Individuals involved in an intense or abnormal event may experience reactions that are perceived as out of the ordinary for them. These reactions are normal. Some of the more common reactions reported by individuals after a critical incident include:

Physical: Nausea, intestinal upset, fatigue/tired, rapid heart, chest pain*, chills, feel faint, dizzy, headaches.

Emotional: Anxious, sad, depressed, denial, fear, guilt, panic, upset, angry, scared.

Cognitive: Memory problems, poor attention, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, disoriented, flashbacks, poor problem solving, poor decisions, sleep disturbance, confused.

Behavioral: Withdrawn, restless, emotional outbursts, increased alcohol, irritable, blame others, change in appetite, startle easily, jumpy, ask WHY?.

*If you experience this, see a doctor.

This is not an inclusive list. Some people exposed to the same event may not suffer any effects at all and this, too, is a normal reaction. While these reactions can be alarming and unsettling, it is important to remember that you are not losing your mind or "falling apart."

If you are experiencing painful thoughts, memories, or feelings during this period, we would like you to contact us at:

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Dealing With Stress And Trauma



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Information on Dealing With Stress and Trauma

Potential Acute Stress Reactions to any Traumatic Event

There are a variety of reactions that an individual may experience that are related to traumatic events. Situations or circumstances that cause trauma generally involve the experiencing, witnessing or being confronted with an outside event that involved an actual or life-threatening situation, or experiencing a threat to one's person or life-threatening harm to others.

Some of the common responses of an individual to trauma are as follows:

1. The person's emotional response is one of intense fear, helplessness or horror.
2. Either while experiencing or after experiencing the distressing event the individual has several of the following symptoms:
 - a) Feeling numb, detached, or the absence of any emotional response.
 - b) Feeling like being in a "daze".
 - c) A feeling of being detached from one's environment.
 - d) Feelings of unreality or strangeness concerning a person's environment, themselves, or both.
3. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in a least one of the following ways:
 - a) Recurrent images and thoughts.
 - b) Recurring dreams and illusions.
 - c) Flashback episodes (reliving the experience).
 - d) Distress on being exposed to things that remind one of the traumatic event.
4. Avoidance of situations that recall the trauma (thoughts, feelings, conversations, activities, places and people).
5. Symptoms of increased anxiety and energy (difficulty sleeping, irritability, poor concentration, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, restlessness).
6. This disturbance causes significant distress or impairment in school, social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning and may lead to isolation behaviors.
7. These reactions can last up to four weeks following the traumatic event.

Symptoms of Individuals Dealing with Stress or Trauma

There are a number of symptoms or behaviors that a person dealing with stress or trauma may exhibit.

1. Suicidal hints (survivor's guilt, "Why were they killed and my life spared?").
2. Psychosomatic problems (increase in reports of headaches, stomachaches, other physical symptoms).
3. Difficulties with school or work (decreased concentration, inability to focus, difficulty going to work or school).
4. Nightmares or sleep disorders (can't get to sleep, need a night light on).
5. Changes in eating patterns (loss of appetite).
6. Children may exhibit temporary regression with otherwise normal behavior (bed wetting, wanting to sleep in the same bedroom as parents or siblings).

Practical Steps to Take During Times of Stress or Trauma

TIME: Time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

REST - RELAXATION - EXERCISE - NOURISHMENT - DIVERSION: You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a "cause" to work for to help others - any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an exhausting process emotionally. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.

SECURITY: Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Getting back into a routine can help. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. You may need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.

HOPE: You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing some things that helped them and realizing that they have recovered, that time does help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful. Focus on the Psalms, Proverbs, and

Ecclesiastes. Meditate on God's promise of comfort, hope and peace.

CARING: Try to allow yourself to accept the expression of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

GOALS: For awhile, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis next week, a movie, or a trip next month helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time helps, as a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same. This is normal. As time passes, you may need to work on some longer range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. You may need guidance or counseling to help with this.

SMALL PLEASURES: Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures as you are ready. Sunsets, a walk, a favorite food - all are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself.

PERMISSION TO FEEL: Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is often the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of life at once. So, we let it in a little at a time.

MEDICATION MAY BE HELPFUL: Medication can be used to help people get through periods of shock under a physician's guidance. This may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving, however, it may be needed for those suffering from extreme symptoms. We cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way OUT is THROUGH.

This information is presented for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for informed medical advice or training. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a mental health problem without consulting a qualified health or mental health care provider.