COPING WITH A MAJOR PERSONAL CRISIS

What you have experienced is a unique and personal event. This booklet will help you know how adults and children have reacted in similar situations. It will show you how you can help normal healing to occur and avoid some pitfalls.

NORMAL FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED

SHOCK AND DISBELIEF
The event seems to be unreal, like a film or a dream.

NUMBNESS
Your emotions are cut off.

FEAR
- Of death, of injury or harm to yourself or those you love
- Of being left alone, or having to leave loved ones
- Of "breaking down" or "losing control"
- Of a similar event happening again

HELPLESSNESS
Crisis may reveal human frailty, as well as strength.

LONGING
For all that has gone and will not be.

GUILT
- For not having helped or saved others
- For being alive and uninjured
- For being better off than others, having things
- Regret for things not done

SHAME
For not having felt and reacted as you would have wished
For having been helpless, "emotional" and needing others

SADNESS
For deaths, injuries and losses of every kind.

EUPHORIA
Joy of survival, feeling high, excited, close to everyone.

ANGER AND FRUSTRATION
At what happened, whoever caused it or allowed it to happen
At the injustice and senselessness of it all
At the shame and indignities
Why me? Why?

LET DOWN
Disappointments, which alternate with . . .

HOPE
For the future, for better times.

These feelings are common and normal, nature heals through allowing their expression. Expressing your emotions and feelings does not mean that you are out of control, or having a nervous breakdown. Even intense feelings only occur for limited periods. They can be dealt with and you can put them on hold when necessary.

You or others, may block feelings for fear that they are too painful.
- The most common ways of blocking are cutting off feelings and being over busy.
- Sometimes you may not be able to express or deal with your feelings immediately.

Remember your reactions may take months or even years to be experienced. The sooner you are able to deal with these feelings, the sooner your healing begins. Prolonged blocking of feelings may lead to difficulties.

REMEMBERING AND MEMORIES
The events and feelings may return to you in your thoughts, daydreams, images, flashbacks, nightmares and nightmares. You may remember past crises. These are normal ways to process the event and make meaning of it. Suppressions, pushing things out of your mind, may lead to loss of memory, concentration and fuzziness of the mind.

Do remember that all responses are NORMAL to an ABNORMAL situation.
PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Your body as well as your mind may be affected immediately or even many months later.

COMMON REACTIONS INCLUDE:
- Tiredness, shakes, dizziness, palpitations
- Difficulty in breathing, choking in the throat and chest pains
- Nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting
- Muscular tension or pain, headache, neck or back pain
- Menstrual disorders, change in the womb. Miscarriages may occur
- Increased or decreased sexual desire or activity. Pregnancy is more common after some crises

Infections frequently occur when you are run down. Alcohol, coffee and drug intake may increase due to extra tension. Accidents are more frequent after severe stress.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

You may form new friendships and groups. However strains in relationships may also appear. As well as the good feelings of giving and receiving there may be conflict, anger and jealousy.

You may feel that too little or too much is offered, or that you cannot give as much as expected. Changes may occur in the way families, friends and the community relate to and need each other.

CHILDREN

Children also experience emotional and physical responses in crises. Their imaginations and nightmares add to the fear of the event. Children express themselves through talking, play and drawing.

Their distress may be shown by returning to earlier ways of behaving such as clinging.

Sometimes these behaviours may be a burden on already stressed parents and teachers. Yet children need the closeness and comfort of their families.

They need to be listened to, understood and given honest explanations. They need reassurance about their own safety and that of their family and that it did not cause the event.

MAKING THE EVENTS AND THE FEELINGS ABOUT THEM EASIER TO BEAR

DOING THINGS

To be active and useful may provide relief and a sense of control. However, overactivity may be harmful if it stops feeling too much.

REALITY

Facing reality will help you to come to terms with the event. For example, viewing the body, going to the funeral, returning to the scene, inspecting losses and visiting the ill and injured.

TALKING

Talking about your experiences and how you feel about them will help. It also helps to listen to others who have been affected.

SUPPORT

Be open to receiving support and comfort and give them when you can.

PRIVACY

Make time and space for yourself to be alone with your own thoughts and feelings.

EXERCISE, REST AND RECREATION

Are important to maintain your physical and mental health.

REACTIONS MAY BE MORE INTENSE OR TROUBLING FOR SOME PEOPLE

BEREAVED

Especially:
- Where deaths were multiple, sudden or violent
- When a child or young person died
- When the body was not found
- When the relationship with the person was difficult

ELDERLY

Readjustment may be harder because of reduced energy and time to rebuild.

EVACUATED/ISOLATED

Those who are hospitalised, evacuated or alone may lose the support of friends and community. Isolation may also occur due to language or cultural differences.
UNWELL AND DISABLED

Anyone with illness or physical or mental disabilities needs special care and support.
People for whom the crisis is on top of other painful experiences
People who are thrown back to the pain of a previous trauma or loss.

EMERGENCY WORKERS/VOLUNTEERS/HELPERS

Especially people who:
Have given deeply of themselves
Come into close contact with the injured, dying or dead
Felt they failed to do their jobs properly
Experienced “burn-out”

SOME DO’S AND DON’TS

DON’T Bottle up feelings
DON’T Avoid talking and thinking about what has happened
DO Allow yourself time to talk, grieve, be angry, cry and laugh according to your needs
DO Allow your children to share in your grief and encourage them to express their own
DO Allow yourself time to be with people who care about you and what you went through
DO Spend time alone when you need it
DO Recognise that everyone expresses things in their own way.
   Men generally find it harder to express emotion and speak.
   Children may need encouragement to express themselves
DO Take time out to sleep, rest, enjoy and do routine things when possible
DO Allow your children to return to school and keep up with their activities as soon as they are ready
DO Express your needs clearly and honestly to family, friends and officials

ACCIDENTS AND ILLNESS ARE MORE COMMON AFTER SEVERE STRESSES

DO Drive more carefully
DO Keep up usual safety standards
DO Continue your normal medical treatment
DO Watch your diet and physical health.
DO Be more careful with coffee, cigarette, alcohol and drug intake

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF

• Your emotions or physical symptoms are too intense or persistent
• You feel too numb, cut off or you have to keep active in order not to feel
• You continue to have nightmares, poor sleep or “flashbacks’’
• Your family, social or work relationships suffer
• Sexual problems develop
• You experience loss of memory and concentration
• Your performance suffers at school, work or at home
• You have accidents or illness
• You increase smoking, drinking or drug taking
• You have no one to talk to about your experience
• You have lost faith in yourself or the world

SEEKING SUPPORT IS A POSITIVE STEP

Deep reaching experiences may lead you to have a sense of being different from before. The inside as well as the outside changes. In time you may develop deeper understanding of yourself and what it means to be a human being.