

Coping With a Major Personal Crisis



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COPING WITH A MAJOR PERSONAL CRISIS

What you have experienced is a unique and personal, physical, and social 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, of having to leave loved ones.
Of "breaking down" or "losing control".
Of a similar event happening again.

HELPLESSNESS

Crises 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.
Regrets 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.
At lack of understanding, inefficiencies.
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 occur only 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 overbusy.

Sometimes you may not be able to express or deal with your feelings immediately.

Then your reactions may take months or even years to be experienced. The earlier 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, nightdreams and nightmares. You may remember past crises. These are normal ways to process the event and make meaning of it.

Suppression, pushing things out of your mind, may lead to loss of memory and concentration, and fuzziness of the mind.

**Do remember that your RESPONSES are
NORMAL. The SITUATION is ABNORMAL.**

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, headaches, neck or back pain.
- Menstrual disorders, dragging in the womb. Miscarriages may occur.
- Increased or decreased sexual desire or activity. Pregnancies are 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 the wrong things are 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 imaginings 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 comforting of their families.

They need to be understood, believed, and given honest explanations. They need reassurance about their own safety and that of the family, and that they 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

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

SUPPORT

Be open to receiving support and comfort and give support 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 are 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 previous traumas and losses.

EMERGENCY WORKERS/VOLUNTEERS/HELPERS

Especially who:

Have given deeply of themselves.

Came into close contact with the injured, dying or dead.

Felt they failed to do their job properly

Experienced "burn-out"

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

DON'T Bottle up feelings.

DON'T Avoid talking and thinking about what 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 feelings.

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 to weep. 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 ILLNESSES ARE MORE COMMON AFTER SEVERE STRESSES

Therefore

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 intakes of coffee, cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs.

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 a sense of being different from before.

You may feel that the inside as well as the outside changes, but in time you may develop deeper understanding of yourself and what it means to be a human being.