



## **Debriefing Information**

### **Stages of Loss / Grief**

#### **Shock/Denial**

The initial reaction -- the psychological process we use to protect ourselves from becoming overwhelmed

Experienced as:

- Numbness or does not sink in  
-This can't be happening
- Denying - Ignoring - Minimizing the event

#### **Anger/Anxiety**

Focus is on the personal impact, the unfairness

- Personal distress levels rise--looking for someone or something to blame
- "Displaced" anger at others not involved
- Rebelliousness

#### **Sadness/Depression**

Focus on the sadness, helplessness

- Lack of appetite or increased appetite
- Difficulty and/or change in sleeping routine
- Not enjoying things you did in the past
- Withdrawal

#### **Exploration/Acceptance**

Attention shifts to a future-focus, drawing on internal energy to focus on the future.

These are all healthy to some extent, but when a person gets stuck in a stage, this eventually impedes the natural healing process.

## PHYSICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS you may or may not have felt these upon hearing of / witnessing the trauma:

- o Rapid heartbeat
- o Trembling & Shaking
- o Excessive sweating
- o Trouble breathing
- o Nausea or stomach problems
- o Diarrhea
- o Ringing in the ears

REACTIONS you may or may not be having now as a result of the trauma:

- o Preoccupation with the incident
- o Poor concentration
- o Feelings of anger
- o Headaches and pains
- o Extreme feelings of helplessness
- o Sleep Disturbances
- o Loss of Appetite
- o Feelings of Guilt
- o Feelings of Unfairness
- o Feeling tired and weak

**The above are all normal reactions to an abnormal situation. These reactions should get better with time and as you talk about your feelings and reactions.**

REACTIONS to watch out for:

- o Withdrawal from others
- o Ongoing weakness and tiredness
- o Self medication -- increased use of alcohol or drugs to block the pain
- o Increased risk taking behavior
- o Disinterest in things you were interested in before
- o Increased physical problems
- o Thoughts about death and dying
- o Marital or other relationship problems that don't go away
- o Impulse control problems - such as, outbursts of anger
- o Feelings of Low Self-esteem of Worthlessness

# WHAT TO EXPECT AS RECOVERY CONTINUES

The following are normal reactions after a trauma:

- o Post-trauma reactions will decrease in intensity and frequency.
- o Fluctuations between feeling in control and feeling anxious or overwhelmed.
- o Questioning pre-trauma assumptions and beliefs.
- o Flashbacks -- a normal response after experiencing a traumatic event. They can be triggered by anything that reminds you of the trauma (sights, sounds, smells, hearing of similar incidents). You may not always be aware of what triggered the response. Flashbacks will fade with the passage of time.
- o Triggers -- Situations which strongly remind you of the trauma may trigger the feelings that occurred immediately after the event. For example, anniversary date, reading articles about similar incidents, returning to the area where the incident occurred, or court dates.

# **“DOs AND DON'Ts”**

~ for dealing with Post-Trauma Stress ~

## **DO**

- o Structure your life as much as possible
- o Find and talk to supportive peers and/or family members
- o Maintain a balanced diet
- o Increase physical exercise
- o Get ample rest
- o Take time for leisure activities
- o Expect losses to bother you
- o Attempt to create a less stressful environment around you
- o Find an escape in a relaxing book or take a short, weekend trip
- o Attend any meetings regarding the traumatic event
- o Get extra help from a counselor if you need it
- o Share your feelings with your fellow workers
- o Spend time with family and friends

## **DON'T**

- o Drink alcohol excessively
- o Use legal or illegal substances to block emotional pain
- o Eat lots of sugar or increase caffeine
- o Stay away from work
- o Withdraw from significant others
- o Be hard on yourself and others
- o Look for easy answers
- o Punish yourself with a lot of negative self talk
- o Overspend on things you cannot afford
- o Have unrealistic expectations for recovery
- o Stuff your feelings, pretending everything is okay
- o Take on new major projects
- o Make major life changes/decisions

# Fifteen Stress Busters

**TAKE CHARGE** - Figure out what you can take charge of or change in a situation and do it. Don't worry about what you can't take charge of or change.

**REFRAME** - Turn a crisis into a challenge or opportunity.

**TALK YOURSELF UP** - When self-defeating thoughts invade, dig yourself out with positive self-talk that challenges the negative.

**SAY NO** - After evaluating a situation carefully, don't accede to unrealistic demands. If need be, offer compromise.

**TAKE A BREAK** - Remove yourself from a stressful situation, at least for a few minutes. Take a walk. Sit quietly in your office. Talk to a co-worker. Tell a joke.

**TREAT YOURSELF** - Make a list of ten things you like to do and do at least one of these activities every day.

**SET PRIORITIES** - Organize yourself. Write down everything you need to do today. Write #1 next to the task with the worst penalty for lateness, #2 for the next worst, etc. Then tackle the must-do tasks first before they create too much stress. Proceed through your list one task at a time.

**PARTIALIZE A BIG PROBLEM** - Breakdown big problems, projects, or tasks into small, manageable pieces and deal with one piece at a time.

**ANTICIPATE STRESSORS** - Many things that cause us stress we know are likely to occur. Develop a plan of action for predictable stressors before they happen.

**TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF** - Get a good night's sleep, eat well, and exercise. Use prescription drugs properly and avoid alcohol and other drugs. Avoid large amounts of caffeine because it blocks your body's natural tranquilizers.

**USE DEEP BREATHING** - Sit upright. Put your hand on your stomach, pushing out as you inhale (as if filling your stomach with air). When your stomach expands, it lowers your diaphragm and pulls air into the bottom of your lungs to the top. Hold for a count of three. Exhale. Repeat several times.

**RELAX WITH VISUALIZATION** - Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a place you enjoy being - the beach, the ski slopes, etc. Make the sights, sounds and sensations of that place vivid in your mind. Concentrate for a few minutes on the peacefulness found there. Open your eyes, taking that relaxing feeling with you.

**USE YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEMS** - Talking about problems or things that worry you helps. It can make you feel better to “get things off your chest” and you may get a different perspective on the situation or learn other options for dealing with the problem. Support systems can include friends, family, co-workers, your boss, a counselor, or priests, ministers, or rabbis.

**DON'T TRY TO BE PERFECT** - Nobody is. Do the best you can and then let it go.

**MAINTAIN YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR** - Laugh, play, be silly occasionally.

Modified but taken from “Stress Busters” by Andres Roldin, in Working Mother magazine, November, 1988.



# HOW TO HELP THOSE YOU CARE ABOUT

(Give this to your loved one / friend so they can know what things they can do to help you with the trauma you have gone through)

1. Spend time with the individual.
2. Encourage the individual to talk about the feelings and let him/her know you care.
3. Do not say, "I know how you feel". Instead, say that you are sorry for his/her pain or loss.
4. Don't assume that men cope with trauma better than women.
5. Offer assistance whether or not he/she has asked for help.
6. Don't tell the individual that everything will be okay. Let him/her know you will be there and offer your support through listening.
7. Don't try to find explanations for what happened.
8. Offer to accompany the individual to any events associated with the trauma (court hearings, funerals, etc.).
9. Help with everyday tasks, like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, etc.
10. Allow the individual some private time.
11. Try not to take his/her anger or other feelings personally.
12. Sometimes you don't have to say anything. Just being there is enough.

# WHEN SHOULD A PERSON SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP?

*Since no two people are exactly the same, the point at which professional help is needed can vary greatly. However, here are some general guidelines.*

You should seek professional help when:

- 1) You see your life falling apart: marital problems, family conflict, loss of friendships, problems at work or school.
- 2) You suffer chronic physical problems and no organic cause can be found.
- 3) You are preoccupied with thoughts about the event.
- 4) You feel desperately lonely and afraid.
- 5) You are unable to make decisions, and have difficulty concentrating.
- 6) You have feelings of hopelessness, severe depression, or rage.
- 7) You are overly reliant on alcohol or other drugs to block pain.

To seek professional help, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). WAP, Inc. clients should call 1-800-343-3822 to schedule an appointment with a counselor for short-term assistance or referral to a longer-term resource.