



Coping After a Crisis

Critical Events and Aftershock

You have experienced a traumatic event. Even though the event may be over, you may be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions (aftershocks). It's very common and quite normal to experience such reactions. Some reactions may appear immediately after the event, while others may appear a few days later. In certain cases, the reactions may appear weeks or months later.

These reactions are neither a sign of weakness nor an indication you're not handling the situation well. Rather, they're simply the way your body is attempting to deal with the event.

Generally, the severity of the reactions will begin to lessen within a few days or weeks. This doesn't mean that you can expect to forget the event entirely. With the passage of time, however, you'll be able to put the event into perspective and complete the healing process.

So you won't be caught off guard, here are some very common signs of 'aftershock':

Physical

Fatigue
Nausea
Muscle tremors
Chest pain*
Difficulty breathing*
Elevated blood pressure*
Rapid heart rate*
Headaches
Dizziness
Sweating
Chills
Shock symptoms*
Fainting

Thinking

Blaming someone
Confusion
Poor decision-making
Heightened or lowered alertness
Poor concentration
Memory problems
Poor problem solving
Poor abstract thinking
Loss of orientation to time or place
Nightmares
Intrusive images
Disbelief
Flashbacks
Self-blame

Emotional

Anxiety
Guilt
Grief
Denial
Severe panic (rare)
Fear
Loss of emotional control
Depression
Apprehension
Feeling overwhelmed
Anger and agitation
Irritability
Sense of vulnerability
Feelings of loss
Feelings of helplessness

Behavioral

Change in speech patterns
Withdrawal
Emotional outbursts
Suspiciousness
Loss or increase of appetite
Increased alcohol consumption
Inability to relax or sleep
Increased alertness
Startle reflex intensified
Pacing
Erratic movements
Restlessness

* These indicate the need for a medical evaluation

Contact your clinician for additional information.

Helpful Suggestions for Coping with Critical Events

- Don't be frightened by traumatic stress reactions. Also, don't be surprised if it takes a little time before you start feeling like your old self again.
- Don't withdraw. Take time to share your thoughts and feelings with your family members and supportive coworkers.
- Keep your daily life as normal as possible to reduce stress. Don't start any new or major projects unless absolutely necessary until you're feeling better.
- Do things that help you feel good and increase your feelings of self-control.
- Stay busy but don't forget to take time for relaxation and leisure activities.
- Get some exercise, even if it's just a walk in the neighborhood.
- Be sure you eat properly and regularly -- even if food doesn't have its normal appeal.
- Avoid the temptation to escape with drugs and alcohol.
- Limit your intake of caffeine and sugar, especially if you're having difficulty sleeping.
- If you're having difficulty sleeping, don't lie there tossing and turning. Get up and do something until you're able to fall asleep.
- Be prepared for "trigger" stimuli that may cause a stress reaction (for example, seeing an article about a similar event in the newspaper).
- Work towards eventually accepting the event and coming to peace about its consequences.
- Seek professional counseling if necessary.

How to Help Your Friend or Loved One

- Spend time with the person who experienced the trauma. Very often you don't even have to say much -- just "being there" for them can be as helpful as anything you might be able to say.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and emotions. Don't try to fix anything or try to rationalize why the event happened. Your role is to be a good listener.
- Be respectful if they request some private time. But don't assume they want to be alone just because they don't seek you out first.
- Offer specific assistance. Avoid saying something vague, such as "How can I help?" Instead, say something such as "Can I help by taking care of the kids tonight?" or "Would it be OK if I brought dinner over tonight?"
- Remember that anyone can be affected by a traumatic event.
- Sometimes people in trauma say or do things they wouldn't do under normal circumstances. Don't take it personally.
- Offer to accompany them to any events associated with the trauma (funerals, hospitals, court, etc.).

If you have questions, please call your Employee Assistance Program at **1-800-280-3782**.

Tiene derecho a recibir ayuda e información en su idioma sin costo. Para solicitar un intérprete, llame al número de teléfono gratuito para miembros que se encuentra en su tarjeta de identificación del plan o los documentos de su plan.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

1-800-280-3782