

# Learning About Coping After a Traumatic Event



## What is a traumatic event?

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A traumatic event is a very upsetting event that you see or that happens to you or a loved one. It may threaten someone's life or cause serious injury. It can be a one-time event, like a sexual assault or a car crash. Or it may be ongoing, such as abuse or severe illness.

## How can it affect you?

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Everyone responds to traumatic events in different ways. But it's common to have some type of reaction. You may react right away or days, weeks, or months later.

After a traumatic event you may:

- Have changes in your emotions, such as:
  - Feeling hopeless or that the world and other people aren't safe.
  - Being overwhelmed by certain emotions, such as anxiety, anger, shame, or guilt.
  - Feeling too little emotion, or numb.
- Have changes in your behaviors, such as:
  - Avoiding people or places that remind you of the event.
  - Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities.
  - Having disturbing memories or dreams about the event. Certain smells, noises, or other reminders of the event may cause them.
  - Having trouble with sexual relationships.
- Have physical changes, such as:
  - Having headaches, dizziness, or tiredness that you can't explain.
  - Startling easily or feeling like you can't relax.
  - Having trouble sleeping.

- Having memory loss or trouble concentrating.

It can take months or years to heal from a traumatic event. But most people get better with time. If you need help to get better, contact your doctor or counselor.

If you are feeling hopeless or like you might harm yourself, get help right away.

### **Where to get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week**

If you or someone you know talks about suicide, self-harm, a mental health crisis, a substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress, get help right away. You can:

- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**.
- Call **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
- Text **HOME to 741741** to access the Crisis Text Line.

Consider saving these numbers in your phone.

Go to **988lifeline.org** for more information or to chat online.

## **How can you care for yourself?**

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There are a few things you can do after a traumatic event to help care for yourself. Some people may feel that these are hard to do at first. But over time these tips can help.

- Find a counselor.  
You can ask your doctor for a referral. Or you might contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). You can text 741741 for 24/7 free support from a trained counselor. You can also call the NAMI HelpLine (1-800-950-6264) or go online ([www.nami.org/help](http://www.nami.org/help)) to chat with a trained volunteer.
- Connect with others.  
Make plans to spend time with friends or family members. You might also try a support group.
- Follow healthy habits.  
For example, eat a variety of foods, including grains, proteins, vegetables and fruit, and dairy. And follow a regular sleep schedule.
- Move your body.  
Walking may be a good choice. You also may want to do other activities, such as running, dancing, or playing team sports.
- Make time to relax.  
You might listen to soothing music or take a hot bath. Some people find yoga, meditation, or walks in nature calming.
- Seek out meaningful activities.  
They can help take your mind off things. For instance, you could help a friend, or you could volunteer in your community.
- Be kind to yourself.  
Sometimes people blame themselves for what happened, even though it wasn't their fault. If you are struggling with guilt about the event, ask your counselor for help.
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to feel better.

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