

# RECOVERING FROM A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE



Unfortunately, experiencing a trauma is common (more than 2 out of 3 people will experience a traumatic event in their lifetime).

Trauma's can include such things as exposure to war, sexual and/or physical assault, abuse, death of a loved one, an accident. Some people recover well after a traumatic experience, however for others the road to recovery is a little longer.

Following are some steps that may help your wellbeing after a traumatic experience.

## tips for trauma recovery

### **Acknowledge the trauma**

Some people find it difficult to acknowledge that what they went through was traumatic. However, it is important to accept that you have been through a distressing experience, and give yourself permission to have a reaction to this.

### **Seek the support of others you trust**

Often it can be useful to talk through, write about, or draw your traumatic experience. By talking, writing or drawing you can help to dispel the feelings of distress attached to your memories. Some people find they need to do this often, so if you choose to talk about your experience make sure the other person is willing to hear your story over and over again.

### **Understand how the trauma may affect you**

Some people have strong thoughts, feelings or physical reactions after a trauma. *Thoughts* or memories of the event can be invasive, you may experience nightmares, or you may find it hard to concentrate or remember.

*Feelings* can include fear, numbness, depression, guilt, irritability or panic. Some people find that their feelings are steady and consistent, others avoid their feelings, some know what they feel but feel all over the place, yet others are overwhelmed at their intense feelings.

*Physically* you may feel over alert, easily startled, exhausted, have general aches and pains or have difficulties sleeping. You may also find yourself withdrawing from your normal activities.

However, know that it's okay (and normal) to experience these things in the *short term* after a traumatic experience.

### **Do something positive**

During a traumatic experience, individuals often say they feel "out of control". By doing something positive after a trauma (such as

talking to someone, thanking someone who may have helped, getting back to doing things you used to) you're restoring a sense of control and counteracting the powerlessness that you may be feeling after the trauma.

### **Make meaning of the trauma**

Some individuals who experience distressing events can grow and live life more fully after the trauma. People who find a sense of meaning for the trauma can have a renewed sense of purpose – they often reassess their goals, values, and relationships – which can influence how they live their life.

### **Look after yourself in the best way you can**

Traumatic events can often throw our everyday routines out. And while it may be difficult as you're feeling stressed and you've got so much else to deal with; eating a healthy diet, exercising and sleeping well, using relaxation strategies, and not overusing alcohol or other drugs will also help in your wellbeing after a trauma.

### **Understand that it's okay to seek help**

For most people they will feel like their intense thoughts, feelings and physical reactions are getting better after a few weeks.

However, if you *continue to experience* distressing physical symptoms or feelings, you feel numb or empty, your relationships are becoming problematic, you have very little support, or you are increasing your use of drugs or alcohol, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

### **How can a psychologist help?**

Psychologists use a range of effective techniques and therapies to assist people in resolving any distressing symptoms they may have as a consequence of a traumatic experience. Speak with your G.P. if you think you could benefit from seeing a psychologist.

*Please feel free to share this article*