

Critical Incident and Trauma - More Recovery Tips¹

Recovering from emotional and psychological trauma takes time. Give yourself time to heal and to mourn the losses you've experienced. Don't try to force the healing process. Be patient with the pace of recovery. Finally, be prepared for difficult and volatile emotions. Allow yourself to feel whatever you're feeling without judgment or guilt. Feeling don't last forever - they will pass.

Trauma self-help strategy 1: Don't isolate

- **Following a trauma**, you may want to withdraw from others, but isolation makes things worse. Connecting to others will help you heal, so make an effort to maintain your relationships and avoid spending too much time alone.
- **Ask for support.** It's important to talk about your feelings and ask for the help you need. Turn to a trusted family member, friend, counsellor, or clergy person.
- **Participate in social activities**, even if you don't feel like it. Do "normal" things with other people, things that have nothing to do with the traumatic experience. If you've retreated from relationships that were once important to you, make the effort to reconnect.
- **Join a support group for trauma survivors.** Being with others facing the same problems helps reduce your sense of isolation and hearing how others cope can help inspire you.
- **Volunteer.** As well as helping others, volunteering can be a great way to challenge the sense of helplessness that often accompanies trauma. Remind yourself of your strengths and reclaim your sense of power by comforting or helping others.

Trauma self-help strategy 2: Stay grounded

In order to stay grounded after a trauma, it helps to have a structured schedule to follow.

- **Stick to a daily routine**, with regular times for waking, sleeping, eating, working, and exercise. Make sure to schedule time for relaxing and social activities, too.
- **Break large jobs into smaller, manageable tasks.** Take pleasure from the accomplishment of achieving something, even it's a small thing.
- **Find activities that make you feel better** and keep your mind occupied (reading, taking a class, cooking, playing with your kids or pets), so you're not dedicating all your energy and attention to focusing on the traumatic experience.
- **Allow yourself to feel what you feel when you feel it.** Acknowledge your feelings about the trauma as they arise and accept them. Accepting your feelings is part of the grieving process and is necessary for healing.

Staying grounded: A trauma self-help exercise

If you are feeling disoriented, confused, or upset, you can do the following exercise:

- **Sit on a chair.** Feel your feet on the ground. Press on your thighs. Feel your behind on the seat and your back against the chair.

¹ http://www.helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm

- **Look around you and** pick six objects that have red or blue. This allows you to feel in the present, more grounded, and in your body. Notice how your breath gets deeper and calmer.
- **You may want to go outdoors** and find a peaceful place to sit on the grass. As you do, feel how your body can be held and supported by the ground.

Trauma self-help strategy 3: Take care of your health

A healthy body increases your ability to cope with stress from a trauma.

- **Get plenty of sleep.** After a traumatic experience, worry or fear may disturb your sleep patterns. A lack of sleep can make your trauma symptoms worse and make it harder to maintain your emotional balance. Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day and aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as their use can worsen your trauma symptoms and exacerbate feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise boosts serotonin, endorphins, and other feel-good brain chemicals. It also boosts self-esteem and helps to improve sleep. For maximum results, aim for 30 to 60 minutes of activity on most days.
- **Eat a well-balanced diet.** Eating small, well-balanced meals throughout the day will help you keep your energy up and minimize mood swings. While you may be drawn to sugary foods for the quick boost they provide, complex carbohydrates are a better choice. Foods rich in certain omega-3 fats—such as salmon, walnuts, soybeans, and flaxseeds—can give your mood a boost.
- **Reduce stress.** Making time for rest and relaxation will help you bring your life back into balance. Try relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises. Schedule activities that bring you joy— favourite hobbies or activities with friends, for example.

Helping someone deal with emotional and psychological trauma

It can be difficult to know how to help a loved one who's suffered a traumatic or distressing experience, but your support can be a crucial factor in their recovery.

- **Be patient and understanding.** Healing from emotional or psychological trauma takes time. Be patient with the pace of recovery and remember that everyone's response to trauma is different. Don't judge your loved one's reaction against your own response or anyone else's.
- **Offer practical support** to help your loved one get back into a normal routine. That may mean help with collecting groceries or housework, or simply being available to talk or listen.
- **Don't pressure your loved one into talking but be available when they want to talk.** Some trauma survivors find it difficult to talk about what happened. Don't force your loved one to open up but let them know you are there to listen whenever they feel ready.
- **Help your loved one to socialize and relax.** Encourage them to participate in physical exercise, seek out friends, and pursue hobbies and other activities that bring them pleasure. Take a fitness class together or set a regular lunch date with friends.
- **Don't take the trauma symptoms personally.** Your loved one may become angry, irritable, withdrawn, or emotionally distant. Remember that this is a result of the trauma and may not have anything to do with you or your relationship.

