

Remember that you are basically the same person that you were before the incident. Do remember that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Do remember that if you suffer too much or too long help is available.

Where to seek professional help

**Crisis Support Team
Dudley Council
Ednam House
St. James's Road
Dudley West
Midlands DY1 3JJ
Telephone: (01384) 812345
E-Mail: crisis.support@dudley.gov.uk**

Issued by the crisis support team



Coping with a major personal crisis

You may have been affected by a recent incident, injury to yourself or to others, or you may have been bereaved. Your experience was a very personal one but this leaflet will help you to understand how others have reacted in similar situations. It will also show how you can help normal healing to occur and to avoid some pitfalls.

Normal feelings & emotions often experienced

Fear & anxiety

- of the effects to oneself and those we love**
- of being left alone or having to leave loved ones**
- of breaking down or losing control**
- of a similar event happening again**

Helplessness

- can show up human powerlessness**
- weakness in lack of control of situation**

Sadness

- for deaths, injuries and losses of every kind**

Longing

- for all that has gone**
- for a return to normality**

Guilt

- for being better off than others, e.g. being alive, not injured**
- for things not done**
- for things that have been said**
- for things that have not been said**

Shame

- for having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others
- for not having reacted as one would have wished

Anger

- at what has happened, at whoever caused it or allowed it to happen
- at the injustice and senselessness of it all
- at the shame and indignities
- at the lack of proper understanding by others
- WHY ME?

Memories

- flashbacks of the event - of feelings, of loss or of love for other people in your life who have been injured or died

Let down

- feelings of disappointment

Hope

- for the future, for better times

Everyone has at least some of these feelings. The experience of other disasters has shown that they may be particularly intense if:

- many people died
- their deaths were sudden, violent or occurred in horrifying circumstances
- people's bodies were not recovered
- there was great dependence on the person who died
- the relationship with the person was at a difficult stage
- this stress came on top of others

Nature heals through allowing these feelings to come out. This will not lead to loss of control of the mind, but stopping these feelings may lead to nervous and physical problems. Crying and expressing your feelings can give relief.

Physical and mental sensations

You may feel bodily sensations with or without the feelings described. Sometimes they are due to the crisis, even if they develop many months after the event.

Some common sensations are tiredness, sleeplessness, bad dreams, fuzziness of the mind including loss of memory and concentration, dizziness, palpitations, shakes, difficulty in breathing, choking in the throat and chest, nausea, diarrhoea, muscular tension which may lead to pain, e.g. headaches, neck and backaches, sensations in the womb, menstrual disorders, change in sexual interest.

You may find that the slightest sudden noise makes you jump, or you may feel very unsafe or under threat for much of the time.

Family & social relationships

New friendships and group bonds may come into being. On the other hand, strains in relationships may appear. The good feelings in giving and receiving may be replaced by conflict. You may feel that too little or the wrong things are offered, or that you cannot give as much as is expected. Accidents are more frequent after severe stresses. Alcohol and drug intakes may increase due to the extra tensions.

Avoidance

You may find it difficult to face any aspect of the incident e.g. talking about it is difficult, you avoid the area where it happened, or people it happened with. You avoid the same form of transport or anything else that reminds you of the incident. You lose interest in your normal social activities or hobbies.

The following make the events and the feelings about them easier to bear

Numbness

Your mind may allow the misfortune to be felt only slowly. At first you may feel numb. The event may seem unreal, like a dream, something that has not really happened. People often see this wrongly either as being strong or uncaring.

Activity

Being active, helping and giving to others may offer some relief. However, over-activity is detrimental if it diverts attention from the help you need yourself.

Reality

Confronting the reality, e.g. attending funerals, inspecting losses, attending anniversaries, returning to the scene, will all help you to come to terms with the event.

Going over it in your mind

As you allow the incident more into your mind, there is a need to think about it, to talk about it and at night to dream about it over and over again. Children may play and draw about the event.

Accepting support

It is a relief to receive other people's physical and emotional support. Do not reject it. Sharing with others who have had similar experiences can be helpful. Barriers can break down and closer relationships develop.

Privacy

In order to deal with feelings, you will find it necessary at times to be alone, or just with family and close friends. Remember that the pain of the emotional/psychological distress usually heals naturally over a period of time. You may even come out wiser and stronger.

Healing

Remember that the pain of the emotional/psychological distress usually heals naturally over a period of time. You may even come out wiser and stronger.

Some do's and don'ts

You may be offered an opportunity to meet with others who were involved to talk about the incident a short time after it happened. This offer may be by the organisation involved in the incident or another official agency.

- Do consider taking up this offer. Talking about the incident with others who were involved often feels very helpful and you will be linked in with whatever forms of continuing support are available**
- Do express your emotions and let others share in the grief**
- Do take every opportunity to review the experience within yourself and with others**

- Do allow yourself to be part of a group of people who care**
- Do take time out to sleep, rest, think and be with close family and friends**
- Do express your needs clearly and honestly to family, friends and officials**
- Do try to keep your lives as normal as possible**
- Do let your children talk to you and others about their emotions and express themselves in games and drawings**
- Do send your children back to school and encourage them to keep up with their activities**
- Do drive more carefully**
- Do be more careful around the home**
- Don't bottle up feelings**
- Don't avoid talking about what happened**
- Don't let your embarrassment stop you giving others the chance to talk**
- Don't forget that your children will experience similar feelings to yourself**
- Don't expect memories to go away - they may stay with you for a long time**

Warning - accidents are more common after severe stresses.

When to seek professional advice

If you are not starting to feel that your reactions and symptoms are reducing after about a month you should consider asking for professional help, most often in the form of specialist trauma support. Your GP may be able to help with specific symptoms.

- If you feel you cannot handle intense feelings or body sensations**
- If you feel that your emotions are not falling into place over a period of time, you feel chronic tension confusion, emptiness or exhaustion**
- If you continue to have emotional or bodily symptoms after a period of about a month**
- If you continue to experience 'avoidance' type symptoms**
- If after a month you continue to feel numb and empty**
- If you have to keep active to suppress your feelings and emotions**
- If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep**
- If you have no person or group with whom to share your emotions and you feel the need to do so**
- If your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop**
- If you have accidents**
- If you continue to smoke, drink or take drugs to excess since the event**

- **If your work performance suffers**
- **If you note those around you are particularly vulnerable or are not coping satisfactorily**
- **If you are suffering exhaustion**
- **If you are pre-occupied with thoughts of harming yourself or others**