

- Allow yourself time to deal with the memories. There may be some aspects of the experience that will be difficult to forget.
- Try to eat something even if you do not feel like eating, as extreme stress can 'burn-up' a lot of the body's energy and lead to weight loss.
- If you cannot sleep, try getting up and doing something relaxing until you feel tired, instead of lying in bed tossing and turning.

How to handle the next few days

- Remind yourself that your reactions are a normal result of experiencing traumatic events and will pass in time.
- Try to re-establish your normal routine as soon as possible, but do not demand too much of yourself, you may need to gradually introduce yourself to tasks that seem difficult.
- If you feel uncomfortable, afraid or anxious, take some long, slow abdominal breaths and remind yourself that you are safe and that the trauma is over.
- Make sure that you are doing things that are relaxing and enjoyable.
- Continue to talk to your family, friends and colleagues about the traumatic event, as this will help you to get over your feeling. Even if you feel a little detached from other people, do not reject their support.

- Work on your general stress levels by ensuring that you have adequate sleep, a good diet and regular exercise. Practise relaxation to help counter nervous tension.

If you know someone who has experienced a traumatic event and has had to take time off work, it is important to know that their general self-confidence may have been damaged and they will need your support when returning to work.

If these experiences continue to disrupt your life, seek advice from your GP or the Staff Counsellors on the following numbers

Frenchay: (0117) 34 03810

UBHT BRI: (0117) 34 20611
(0117) 34 20612

Weston General Hospital (01934) 647 116 ext. 3721

APOHS 2.11



Designed by the Medical illustration department,
Frenchay Hospital, Bristol.

**Avon Partnership NHS Plus
Occupational Health Service**

...always ready to listen

**managing
traumatic
events for you
and your team**

Traumatic events

A traumatic event is an experience that has had significant effect upon a person or person's, for example:

- Physical assault
- Verbal assault
- Bullying or harassment
- Traumatic and/or shocking events
- Build up of stressful or distressing occurrences
- Any combination of the above.

Traumatic events in the workplace are unfortunately quite common and because they can have great impact, it is essential that we each receive the right support.

It is recognised that what is felt to be a traumatic event will depend on each individual's values and circumstances.

What to expect

A great deal of research in recent years has led to a greater understanding about the effects of events that seriously affect the safety or well being of individuals, their family, colleagues or friends. The effects often vary from person to person, but are all normal responses to severe stress.

Common reactions during a traumatic event

When we experience a stressful or threatening event, our bodies automatically respond in a way that helps us to protect ourselves or to escape from the situation. This response can involve an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension and breathing rate. Common

reactions may include intense fear, disbelief, numbness, anger, confusion, pounding heart, trembling or shaking, fast breathing, sweating, nausea.

Common reactions in the days following the traumatic event

It is also common for individuals to continue to react for a number of days, or even weeks following the event. Some of the most commonly reported reactions include:

- Anxiety or fear of being alone
- Being easily startled by loud noises or sudden movements that remind you of the traumatic event
- Flashbacks where images of the event come suddenly into your mind for no apparent reason, or where you mentally experience the event
- Physical symptoms such as trembling, shaking, diarrhoea, constipation, nausea, headaches, sweating, tiredness
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including loss of appetite or sexual interest
- Sadness or feelings of loss or loneliness
- Shock or disbelief at what has happened, feeling numb or unreal, or feeling isolated or detached from other people
- Sleep problems, insomnia, waking in the night, dreams and nightmares
- Problems thinking, concentrating, remembering
- Preoccupation with the traumatic event
- Guilt and self-doubt for not having acted in some way during the traumatic event, or feeling responsible for another person's loss,

injury or death, or for being less affected by the traumatic events than others.

- Anger or irritability at what has happened; at the senselessness of it all; at what caused the event to happen, often asking "Why me?"

Not everyone will experience all of these reactions and this is not an exhaustive list, so you may experience other reactions. All these are normal responses to a traumatic event, they are our body and minds way of understanding and coping with severe stress. In most cases these symptoms will subside over a short period of time, over a few days or sometimes weeks.

What to do immediately after...

We have put together a list of advice that may be helpful directly after the traumatic event.

- Make sure that you are with people. Do not go home to an empty house, if possible get a friend or relative to stay with you. Talking about it may help you to make sense of the event.
- Try to avoid using alcohol, sedatives or sleeping pills (they will only dull the experience and not allow you to deal with your feelings).
- Restrict your use of stimulants (such as tea, coffee, chocolate, cola or cigarettes) as you do not want to make your body even more agitated than it already is.
- Accidents are more common after severe stress, so take extra care especially when driving and using machinery and be more careful around the house.