

COPING WITH A TRAUMATIC EVENT

Have you experienced a traumatic event?

A traumatic event is a situation that threatens your safety or the safety of others in your environment. Whether you are directly or indirectly impacted by trauma, you may experience intense feelings of fear, hopelessness, or anxiety.

Common Traumatic Events

- Physically violent acts such as rape, mugging, or domestic violence
- Acts of terrorism
- Adult or childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Car, plane, or train accidents
- Carjackings
- Natural disasters, such as, floods, tornados, or hurricanes
- Involvement in a combat or war situation
- Witnessing an accident, assault, or suicide
- Unexpected death of a loved one

Common Reactions to Traumatic Events

- Strong emotions including shock, fear, anger, grief, confusion, and horror
- Feelings of helplessness, disbelief, powerlessness, disconnectedness, or aloneness

- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Difficulties sleeping
- Nightmares or disturbing dreams
- Intrusive or upsetting thoughts or memories of the event
- Having strong reactions to things that remind you of the event
- Problems with concentration, learning, and decision-making
- Extreme mood swings, irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger
- Headaches, stomachaches, rashes, or other allergic reactions
- Feelings of foreboding or impending doom, or feelings of fear about the future
- Increased concern about the safety of loved ones or about your own safety
- Thoughts of death or suicide; persistent feelings of pessimism

Coping

- Stay connected to friends and family—many people find it helpful to talk with others about what happened, but even those who prefer not to talk can find comfort in being with loved ones.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well, get enough exercise and sleep. Do activities you enjoy or find relaxing.
- Avoid excessive drinking—remember, alcohol is a depressant.
- Try to get back to your normal routine, but be aware that you may need to do some extra self-care.

- Don't make big life-changing decisions for several months.
- Take time to grieve—traumatic events often leave us with a sense of loss.
- Do something positive to help others—give blood, donate food, volunteer.
- Ask others directly for what you need and want.
- Act on facts about what has happened, not speculation or rumors.

How do I know if I need professional help?

In general, professional support is a good idea if you're having trouble coping on your own.

Strong feelings that won't go away, that last longer than a few weeks, or are interfering with normal functioning may be symptoms of depression, anxiety, or a post-traumatic reaction.

Many people do not seek professional help because they blame their symptoms on personal weakness or think that they should deal with their problems on their own. Many people, however, find that counseling helps them deal with their feelings more effectively.

Campus Resources

University of Pittsburgh Counseling Center
334 William Pitt Union
412-648-7930

Sexual Assault Services
334 William Pitt Union
412-648-7930

Campus Ministry
412-648-1051

On-campus Emergencies
811 (24 hrs)

University of Pittsburgh Police
G1 Posvar Hall
412-624-2121

Student Health Service
3708 Fifth Avenue
412-383-1800

Community Resources

Pittsburgh City Police
911 (24 hrs)

Center for Victims of Violent Crime
412-392-8582 (24 hrs)

Magee-Womens Hospital
412-641-4933 (Emergency Room)

UPMC Presbyterian
412-624-2000 (Emergency Room)

National Information

National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress
Disorder
www.ncptsd.org

National Mental Health Association
1-800-969-NMHA