

Crisis Support & Resource Handout #1

General Tips

Traumatic events can happen with little to no warning. Our reactions to these events are in many cases predictable and manageable. Time and support from caring others is all that it takes. Sometimes we do have reactions that seem to linger or we are just not sure how to manage them. Below are some general Support TIPS to help you:

Support Tip #1

You are not alone. Assess your support systems – family, friends, significant others, peers, community and church groups, to name a few. Take a few minutes and consider who you can rely on to give you a hand.

Support Tip #2

Don't wait for others to approach you with help! They might be waiting for you to approach them! Identify specific things that your support systems can do for you like, pick up the children from school, come over for a visit, spend some time together doing things that you enjoy.

Support Tip #3

Take control of what you want to share with others about your experience. You don't have to repeat your experiences with everyone. Determine what type of information you would like to share with your friends, your family, acquaintances, etc. Also, be prepared to say, "I'd *prefer not to talk further about my experience at this time*".

Support Tip #4

Limit the amount of exposure that you have to post-crisis media coverage. In this world of instant messaging and round-the-clock information this is sometimes difficult to do. However, again, you will need to take control of this as much as possible by changing the channel on your television, listen to alternative radio stations, not check online new groups. This isn't avoidance, it's prevention.

Support Tip #5

In times of turbulence, its easy to notice what has changed. However, in even the most traumatic of events, there are many things that have remained the same. Take a look around. Pay attention to those things familiar. Return to a "normal schedule" as much as possible. Getting up at the regular time, going to work if possible, continuing with regular activities. It's the things that *don't change* that will help us through a difficult time.

Some Behaviors to Avoid

From the Psychological First Aid Manual

- § Do not make assumptions about what survivors are experiencing or what they have been through.
- § Do not assume that everyone exposed to a disaster will be traumatized.
- § Do not pathologize. Most acute reactions are understandable and expectable given what people exposed to the disaster have experienced. Do not label reactions as “symptoms,” or speak in terms of “diagnoses,” “conditions,” “pathologies,” or “disorders.”
- § Do not talk down to or patronize the survivor, or focus on his/her helplessness, weaknesses, mistakes, or disability. Focus instead on what the person has done that is effective or may have contributed to helping others in need, both during the disaster and in the present setting.
- § Do not assume that all survivors want to talk or need to talk to you. Often, being physically present in a supportive and calm way helps affected people feel safer and more able to cope.
- § Do not “debrief” by asking for details of what happened.
- § Do not speculate or offer possibly inaccurate information. If you cannot answer a survivor’s question, do your best to learn the facts.

From the National Center for PTSD – Psychological First Aid Manual

Support and Resources Tools for your *Skill-kit*

Here are some common techniques used for things you want to JUMP START.

REGAINING YOUR FOCUS:

- Pick an activity at work or school that doesn't require a lot of thinking at first. You want to be able to achieve with increasing stress. Going through mail, organizing things on your desk, cleaning out files.
- Watch shows on TV that do not require you to "think".
- Read lightweight material that also doesn't require advanced thinking.
- Start out by trying to concentrate on tasks for only short periods of time. Don't force yourself to concentrate – it usually doesn't work and just leads to frustration
- Try doing activities that you enjoy for short periods of time.
- Pay attention to how long you can concentrate on reading, watching TV, using the computer, participating in an activity. If you don't push it, you will notice that your concentration will return shortly.

YOUR SCHEDULE:

- Maintaining your full schedule may seem a bit too much at first, but if you stick to the basics such as time that you normally get up, eating regularly, meeting friends and family – it helps to normalize things around you.
- Include both time to be with others and time to spend quietly. Prepare in your mind who you would like to share your experience with, how much you want to share and when. This will make it more enjoyable when you are around others because you have the control.
- Try not to introduce a lot of new activities because it might feel overwhelming. We all do better with things which are familiar when distracted or not quite ourselves. It's comforting to go on "autopilot" at times.

TAKE CONTROL:

- Sometimes after event things around us feel pretty out of control, even if we don't. Recognize what you have control over, e.g., your schedule, your exposure to certain aspects of the event, how you want to manage your reactions, who you select to be your support systems. You have more control than you think.
- **Let others know what you need**, so that you will receive the support that you want – not the support that others THINK you want.
- Ask for additional resources that are available to you in the event that you need more. Take action NOW rather than later.

Remember, additional supportive resources are always available if you think you aren't managing your reactions as well as you like. You are the expert on your recovery! Let others know what you need!

Where Do I Start?

Four Questions

Each of us experiences a traumatic event in different ways. How we react is also unique to our individual experience. Managing reactions to a traumatic event may raise the question,

“Where do I start?”

Below are four questions which you can use to form your Reaction Management Plan.

ASK YOURSELF:

- 1. Have I ever felt like this before?**
(Many times it’s just the event that is different, not the reaction. For example, following a stressful period or crisis, maybe you found yourself having some unwanted thoughts and now you’re feeling that way again.)
- 2. If I have experienced this reaction before, how did I manage it?**
(What worked for you? What didn’t work quite so well? If we stay with the unwanted thought example, what helped you to manage those thoughts before? Talking to others, distracting yourself, exercise?)
- 3. What have others done to manage their reactions?**
(Reaching out to friends, family or others who have a shared the experience will help you to add to your “coping skills toolbox”. Don’t underestimate the power of exchanging ideas, suggestions and skills!)
- 4. If I haven’t experienced this reaction before or the reaction is lingering longer than I hoped, what are my choices? Who can I reach out to for assistance?**

Contact your adviser, or the Counseling Center in the University of Pittsburgh.

Use these four questions as a gauge to assess your strengths, your coping skills and additional resources that you might need.

Moving forward is all about you – what you have, what you need and who can help!