

Disasters are always unpredictable, and can cause great loss and impact to our lives. We may experience shock, sadness, despair, hopelessness, or anger. We may also experience fatigue, exhaustion, and even difficulty in falling or staying asleep. Some people may become confused, unable to concentrate, disoriented, and irritable. These are all common reactions to traumatic stress.

What is Traumatic Stress?

Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to abnormal events (e.g. disasters or terrorism), and can manifest itself in many ways. For many people, natural coping allows the stress reactions to gradually diminish.

Some people, however, may develop **posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, a psychological disorder that happens when one is exposed to one or more traumatic events.

Signs of PTSD:

- Intrusive thoughts, memories, vivid nightmares and flashbacks of the traumatic event
- Staying away from reminders of the disaster or trauma
- Intense physical reactions and being hypersensitive to daily happenings

If the conditions persist for over several weeks and are affecting your daily life (day to day living) and work performance, it is important to either seek assistance from mental health professionals such as a clinical psychologist or consult your family doctor.



How can you take care of yourself?

✓ Do...

- Talk to your friends for support or spend time with others
- Share your feelings when you feel ready to do so
- Choose the right person (e.g. spouse, trusted family member, close friend, clergy), time and place when you want to share your feelings
- Try to maintain a normal schedule

- Get adequate rest and eat healthy meals
- Engage in positive activities for distraction (e.g. sports, hobbies, reading)
- Focus on something practical that you can do right now to better manage the situation
- Keep a journal
- Participate in a support group
- Seek counseling



✗ Don't...

- Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Work too much in order to block out your worries and feelings
- Withdraw from your family or friends
- Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help

How can I support others in need?

✓ Do...

- Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- Show interest, attention, and care

- Show respect for the person's reactions and ways of coping
- Recognize their strengths in the process of recovery
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take some time to be resolved

X Don't ...

- Rush to tell someone that he/she will be okay or should just "get over it"
- Act like someone is weak or exaggerating because he or she isn't coping as well as you are
- Discuss your own personal experiences without listening to the other person's story
- Give advice without listening to the person's concerns or asking the person what works for him or her
- Stop people from talking about what is bothering them
- Tell them they are lucky because their case is not the worst

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References:

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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