

Dealing with Trauma and Tragedy

When you are exposed to traumatic events, such as natural disasters, mass violence or terrorism, be aware of how these events can affect you personally. Most people show signs of stress after an event, which is normal. As individuals, stress will affect people differently and for different lengths of time. As your life gets back to normal, the signs should decrease. Know the signs of stress in yourself and in your loved ones. Know how you can relieve stress and when you should get help.

Common Reactions to trauma

- Feeling hopeless
- Indecisiveness
- Jumpy, startle easily
- work of school problems
- stomach upset
- Severe headache when thinking about the event
- Withdrawal, feeling rejected or abandoned
- Feelings of anger
- Looking for someone to blame/
- Trouble sleeping.

Common Problems Resulting from Trauma

- Depression
- Self-blame, guilt, shame
- Suicidal thoughts
- Anger or aggressive behavior
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Positive Coping Actions

- **Talk with others, friends, family, coworkers.** Follow your own instincts about when, to whom and how much you feel like saying. It's OK to say you don't feel like talking about it.
- **Talk to other trauma survivors.** Sharing feelings with others who shared your experience will help validate your feelings making you feel less alone and more understood.
- **Find ways to relax.** Exercise, meditations, jogging, yoga, prayer, listening to music, going for a walk etc.
- **Start a new activity.** Begin an new exercise regime, sign up for a photography class, join a club. Positive recreational activities help distract you from other memories and reactions.
- **Volunteer in the community.** It's important to feel like you have something to offer others and that you are making a contribution. Helping others is beneficial to them and to you.
- **See a counselor for help.** Sometimes symptoms worsen and ordinary efforts at coping don't seem to be working. Don't feel ashamed or embarrassed. Trauma affects people in different ways.

Practice Lifestyle Balance

- Make time for self-reflection
- Notice your own inner experiences, listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings
- Get enough sleep. Make time away from telephones, television and computers.
- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life.
- Allow yourself to cry.
- Find things and people who make you laugh.
- Find a spiritual connections or community
- Be open to “not knowing.”
- Know that grief is a long process
- Honor and acknowledge your feelings.

Where to seek help on NIU Campus

Campus Life Building Rm 200 (815)753-1206

Psychology/computer Science Building (815)753-0591

Counseling, Adult and Higher Education Counseling Lab (815)753-1684

Family Center of NIU, Wirtz Hall (815)753-1684

Counselors are on call 24 hours per day via Public Safety (815)753-1212

Excerpts from “Road to Recovery”

Presentation to ACCESS by Kimberly Johnson and
Martha Singleton

References

<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/factshts/>

<http://www.wistss.org/resourceswhenafriendhasbeentraumatized.cfm>

(Excerpted from Saakvitne, K>W. & Pearlman, L.A. (Eds). 1996 *Transforming the Pain: A workbook on Vicarious traumatization*, New York: Norton)

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