

What family and friends can do

- Spend time together** Make a point of spending time with the person who has suffered the stressful event.
- Offer support** Offer your help and support, along with a willingness to listen.
Don't wait to be asked!
- Listen** Listen to the person affected whenever they want to talk. Sometimes just talking about the event again and again can help them come to terms with it.
- Don't take it personally** If the person affected gets angry or aggressive, don't take this personally.
- Provide privacy** Give the person affected all the privacy they want, and make it easy for them to withdraw if they wish.
- Encourage self-responsibility** Give the person affected all the support they need, but don't take too much responsibility away from them. Make sure they remain «active», too!



Information

for people who have suffered a stressful event and their family and friends



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The event

You have suffered a stressful event. Everyone has their own ways of dealing with stress. Despite these, though, you may still experience an unexpected emotional and/or physical reaction to what you have gone through, either now or at a later date.

Reactions to stress Sometimes our reactions to stress or other emotional responses may occur immediately after the event; sometimes this may happen only hours or days later. And in some cases it may be weeks or even months before such reactions occur.

Duration These stress reactions may vary in length. Sometimes they last only a few days; sometimes they may persist for months (or even longer in a few isolated cases).

Support You may also feel that the event you have experienced was so stressful that you cannot cope with the effects it is having on you alone, and need some further medical or psychological support.

Common stress reactions

Physical Exhaustion, fatigue, nausea, drowsiness, headaches, sweating, insomnia.

Mental Nervousness, difficulty concentrating, flashbacks, nightmares, uncertainty, increased vigilance.

Emotional Anxiety, depression, anger, helplessness, guilt, sudden emotional releases, panic.

Behavioural Apathy, withdrawal, silence, sudden crying, loss of/increase in appetite, irritation, restlessness, overreactions, increased consumption of alcohol or medication.

Ways and means of coming to terms with the stressful experience

Talking Talk to people you trust about what is affecting you and how you are feeling. If you can't sleep or don't have anyone to talk to, write your thoughts down instead.

Routine Pick up your normal daily and weekly routines again: familiar day-to-day tasks will help to keep you «grounded». Also: occupy yourself with things you have enjoyed doing in the past.

Time for feelings Give yourself time to mourn, and cry if you want to. Don't put yourself under any pressure to «get back to normal» as soon as possible.

Exercise and rest Keep yourself physically active (e.g. by walking or playing sport). But give yourself adequate time to rest and relax, too.

Nutrition Take care to eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep. Don't drink more alcohol than you normally would.

One step at a time Set yourself small and achievable goals for the challenges you face. Don't try to do everything at once: take it all one step at a time.

Flashbacks People who have suffered a stressful event will often have recurring thoughts and memories about it. These will, however, tend to become less frequent and less intensive over time.

If you're still having problems a long time after the stressful event and things don't seem to be getting any easier, don't hesitate to seek expert help (e.g. your family doctor or a psychologist).