

How to look after yourself if you have witnessed, been involved in, or been affected by a major incident (which might include a serious road accident, serious assault, a violent crime, being caught up in a terrorist incident)

Extreme and traumatic events can have a profound effect on us. It can be helpful to understand the reactions and changes we experience and take steps to help ourselves cope, especially in the early days following the incident.

This leaflet explains some of the common responses to a traumatic event and gives ideas on how you can help support yourself and others in the days following the event.

Things you may notice:

Memories and dreams about the event..... Feeling distressed and tearful

Feelings of anger, or the opposite, feeling numb.....Feeling fearful, constantly watchful or alert

Avoiding places or people.....Difficulty sleeping.....Tiredness

Other physical symptoms like changes in appetite, headaches or difficulty concentrating

These are NORMAL reactions to an abnormal event and are likely to subside with time.

There are a number of things you can do at this time, to help the adjustment process and to look after yourself well:

- Keep a normal healthy routine: sleep the same amount as normal, take breaks to relax and engage in pleasant activities, and eat regularly and healthily.
- Talk to people you trust. You don't have to tell everyone everything but telling nobody anything can be unhelpful.
- Take care when driving or riding – accidents are more common after a traumatic or stressful event
- Try to reduce demands on yourself for a short while and don't take on extra responsibilities at this time.

If you find you are experiencing flashbacks (memories where you feel like you are back at the time of the trauma) or recurring nightmares you can use the following technique to help ground yourself back into the present:

1. Remind yourself that what happened is in the past. The flashbacks and dreams are a normal way of processing what has happened. They are part of the healing process.
2. Bring your attention to the present by looking around or moving around and notice: - what do you see? (colours, shapes, objects, people..) What can you hear?...What can you smell? What can you touch? Where are you now?
3. You might want to carry a "grounding object" – like a stone with an interesting texture, something with a pleasant memory or a pleasant smell.

If, after several weeks, you are still experiencing unusual or distressing symptoms, you can seek help from a professional by speaking to your GP or you can contact TalkPlus www.talkplus.org.uk or 01252 533 355 to discuss it further.