

Healthy Coping Strategies for After a Traumatic Event

After a traumatic event, many find it common to experience feelings of shock and denial. Some people identify feeling as if they are stunned or dazed with difficulties with memory and focus. Emotions may become unexpectedly intense or stunted resulting in behavioral changes such as irritability and outbursts of emotion or the desire to withdraw from others. This can strain relationships, sometimes leading to feelings of depression and anxiety. It is important to remember that while everyone experiences trauma differently, most individuals are capable of bouncing back to a “new normal” in a relatively short amount of time.



Talk about it.

Attend Critical Incident Stress Management Services offered in your community or by your employer. Ask for support from people who care about you and will listen while not monopolizing the conversation by telling their own story.

Redirect your thoughts.

Remind yourself of people and events that are meaningful and comforting.

Be patient with yourself.

Remember that it is common to experience an entire range of emotions relating to the event and that often emotions can shift quickly and unexpectedly. Absolve yourself of blame and guilt by acknowledging you did what you thought was best at the time of the event.

Turn it off and take a break.

Give yourself permission to take breaks and schedule time to distract yourself from thinking about the incident. Consider taking a break from social media too.

Try to rest more than usual.

Trauma is a shock to your system as a whole. It is common to feel tired mentally, emotionally and physically. Allow yourself to sleep and rest when you need to. Do something to calm yourself, and do not lie in bed clock watching when you can't sleep. Utilize breathing and relaxation recordings (<https://osuhealthplan.com/members/ohio-state-employee-assistance-program-eap/osu-eap-tools>).

Take care of yourself.

For many people, the drive to help others is strong. Remember to first take care of yourself. Model self-care by eating, staying hydrated and reaching out for help: such behaviors can influence others around you in a positive way.

Know what to look for.

In some cases, trauma can exhaust our ability to cope, and we are unable to bounce back on our own. Know the signs and symptoms of a worsening trauma response and when and how to ask for help.



Come together as a Community.

Attend Critical Incident Stress Management Services offered in your community or by your employer. Participate in community support initiatives, such as memorial services. Consider finding a support group of others who have experienced trauma, and look for opportunities to support others you may know who also experienced the traumatic event.

When to Seek Professional Advice



If your symptoms related to the traumatic event persist or worsen after two weeks, consider meeting with a mental health professional. The OSU EAP offers five complimentary, confidential sessions with an experienced, trained and licensed professional therapist to assist you.



Symptoms indicating the need to seek professional help can include:

- Persistent increase or decrease in appetite resulting in weight gain or weight loss
- The inability to get continuous restful sleep for a minimum of five hours
- The desire to sleep all the time or feeling overly fatigued
- Disruptive inability to focus and concentrate
- Decreased interest in pleasurable activities
- Lack of desire to interact with others and increased need to be alone
- The feeling of being “keyed-up” or difficulties quieting your mind
- Intrusive thoughts related to the event or “flashbacks” and/or nightmares
- Avoidance of or inability to revisit specific people or geographic locations related to the event
- Emotional sensitivity resulting in feeling unable to control one’s emotions
- Persistent worry or fear of the event occurring again or things associated with the event

The Ohio State Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Phone: (800) 678-6265 Email: eap@osumc.edu