

WHAT CAN HELP?

For Yourself

- Rest more
- Have contact with friends
- Try not to fight recurring thoughts, dreams and flashbacks
- Have someone stay with you for at least a few hours in a day
- Maintain your usual schedule as much as possible.
- Eat balanced meals regularly. Eating a little often may help
- Do some physical activity
- Express your feelings as they arise
- Talk to people who care about you
- Talk to a professional counsellor if your feelings are very intense or are prolonged.

For Family Members and Friends

- Listen carefully
- Spend time with the traumatised person
- Offer support even if you haven't been asked for help
- Offer realistic reassurance that they are safe
- Help with every day tasks e.g., cooking and cleaning
- Allow privacy
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally
- Don't tell them they are "lucky it wasn't worse" or give unrealistic advice. This isn't consoling, instead it minimises the traumatised person's feelings and experience
- Tell them that you are sorry such an event occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.

If the symptoms described are severe or if they last longer than six weeks, professional counselling may be needed.

STUDENT COUNSELLING SERVICES
SKILLS – INSIGHT - SUPPORT

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

If you would like to make an appointment to see a counsellor to learn more about this topic, please contact the counselling service on your campus.

Distance students can contact any of the campuses. Please tell the receptionist if you need an urgent appointment.

CONTACT DETAILS

ALBANY

Health and Counselling

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm
Monday - Friday
Phone (09) 443 9783
Email: Studenthealth@massey.ac.nz

MANAWATŪ

Student Counselling Service

Turitea Campus, Palmerston North

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm
Monday - Friday
Phone (06) 350 5533
Email: s.counselling@massey.ac.nz

WELLINGTON

Student Counselling Service

Hours 8.30am - 4.30pm
Monday - Friday
Phone (04) 801 2542

<http://crow.massey.ac.nz>

<http://health-counselling.massey.ac.nz>

0800 MASSEY | MASSEY.AC.NZ

COPING WITH TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS STUDENT COUNSELLING



COPING WITH TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS

A traumatic incident is any event that has a stressful impact sufficient to overwhelm your usual coping strategies. Traumatic incidents are usually sudden and shocking, and outside the range of ordinary human experience. Examples of traumatic incidents include accidents, violent assaults, suicides or suicide attempts by friends or family members, and natural disasters e.g., earthquakes and floods.

There are strong emotional effects associated with traumatic incidents which are often described as “**normal responses to abnormal events**”. Learning to recognise the normal reactions and emotions that occur following an abnormal event can help you to understand and feel more at ease with these feelings. This in turn can help you adjust to what has happened.

COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Each person’s experience is unique, however there are some common reactions among people caught up in a traumatic event. It can be reassuring to know that these reactions are not unusual. Expressing your feelings and talking about your reactions helps.

SOME COMMON REACTIONS AND FEELINGS INCLUDE:

Shock

- Disbelief at what has happened
- Numbness – the event may seem unreal like a dream
- You may be slow to comprehend what has happened.

Fears

- Of death or damage to yourself
- Recurrence of the event Personal vulnerability – it may be difficult to admit that you are vulnerable
- You may have panicky irrational feelings
- Other apparently unrelated fears may appear.

Anger

- Outrage at what has happened or at who “caused it or allowed it to happen”
- Anger at the injustice and senselessness of it all
- Anger at medical personnel or police for not acting properly or quickly enough.

Helplessness

- Traumatic incidents can show up our human powerlessness to prevent some things from happening.

Sadness

- About personal loss
- About human destruction
- For the loss of the belief that the world is safe and predictable.

Shame

- For having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others
- For perhaps not having reacted as you would have wished.
- Different reactions to trauma may occur as time goes by. They usually only last for a short period of time and gradually diminish over the first few weeks. Occasionally reactions may not appear until some time after the event.



EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOUR

- **Tension:** You may be easily startled and agitated
- **Sleep Disturbances:** You may be finding it difficult to sleep. You might be having thoughts that prevent sleep e.g., replay of the incident
- **Dreams and Nightmares:** You may be dreaming about the incident or other frightening events
- **Flashback:** You may feel that you are repeatedly re-experiencing the event
- **Fearfulness:** You may be frightened by reminders of the incident e.g., the place it happened
- **Intrusive memories and feelings:** Your concentration may be affected by memories, flashbacks and feelings about the event. You may be trying to shut these out. This may lead to deadening of feelings and thoughts
- **Irritability:** You may experience mood swings. One minute you may be feeling happy and the next minute very sad or angry
- **Depression:** You may feel depressed about the event or past events or guilty about how you behaved
- **Social Withdrawal:** You may have a strong desire to be alone (or you may fear being alone)
- **Physical Sensations:** You may be experiencing a range of physical sensations. These might include: tiredness, palpitations, tremors, breathing difficulties, headaches, tense muscles, aches and pains, loss of appetite, loss of interest in sex, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation
- **Delayed Effects:** Any of these effects may occur months or even years after satisfactory adjustment when something triggers them.

While these symptoms are not unusual they can be very distressing for you and your family.