

- Do some 'normal' things with other people. Sometimes you will want to be with other people, but not to talk about what has happened. This can also be part of the healing process.
- Take care. After a trauma, people are more likely to have accidents.
- Don't bottle up your feelings. Strong feelings are natural; bottling them up can make you feel worse. Let yourself talk about what has happened and how you feel, and don't worry if you cry.
- Don't use drink or drugs. Alcohol or drugs can blot out painful memories for a while, but they will stop you from coming to terms with what has happened. They can also cause depression.
- Don't make any big decisions regarding life changes. Your ability to make decisions may not be at its best and you may make choices you later regret. Take advice from people you trust.

What professional help is available?

Family and friends will probably be able to see you through this difficult time. However, if your feelings are too much for you to cope with or if you feel that you are not returning to normal after six weeks then it is important to seek help:

Your GP might suggest that you talk with someone who specialises in helping people cope with traumas. They will usually use a talking treatment, such as counselling or psychotherapy.

You may find that there is a support group for people who have been through a similar trauma to yourself. It can be helpful to hear that others have had similar feelings and experiences.

Medication can sometimes be helpful following a trauma, but it is still important to see your doctor regularly to check how you are doing. Drugs such as tranquillisers can help to reduce anxiety and help you sleep. You can become ill with depression following a trauma. Depression can be helped by antidepressants and by counselling.

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Guide to Trauma

This leaflet contains information about what can happen to your mind and body after experiencing a traumatic event. It will help you to understand some of the symptoms you are experiencing, and why they are happening to you.

Rowan offers group and individual support/counselling/debriefing to individuals and organisations that have experienced a traumatic event.

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Everyone's experience of trauma is different, even if they have experienced the same traumatic event. Therefore, not everything in this leaflet will apply to you.

It may help to discuss the parts that seem relevant to your situation with someone you feel safe with and can trust. These may be friends and family or perhaps it may be useful to see a counsellor. The more you and people close to you understand what is happening, the better the chance you have of making some positive changes.

What is Trauma?

Any of us can have an experience that is overwhelming, frightening, and beyond our control. A traumatic event could be the sudden / violent death of a colleague, a near-miss accident to yourself or a colleague, a threatening event at work such as a violent assault by a member of public, or the witnessing of a violent incident.

A trauma is a frightening experience, which your mind and body may have trouble coping with. Remember: it is normal for a trauma to cause changes in how you feel, think and act. Try not to worry about these changes; this will only make things worse. What is traumatic to one person may not be for someone else. Some causes of trauma include:

- experience of abuse or neglect;
- dangerous, life-threatening events;
- accident, injury or disability.

What happens to you after a traumatic event?

When you are involved in a trauma your memory of it is stored in two separate 'compartments.' One compartment will store a small amount of information about the trauma in the form of words. The other compartment will store a large amount of information in the form of pictures, sounds, sights and tastes. These memories are sometimes difficult to access but they can be triggered by cues which have some similarity to the trauma.

The trauma reactions may be particularly intense if several people have died, the deaths/attack is sudden, violent or occurred in horrifying circumstances, there were strong links with the person who died, or the relationship was at a difficult stage, this incident came on top of other incidents/stresses.

Your experience of any traumatic event will be very personal, but it is usual to feel some of the following feelings and emotions:

- Frightened – you may worry that the same thing will happen again, or that you might lose control of your feelings and break down
- Helpless – triggered by something happening to you that you could do nothing about. You may feel vulnerable and overwhelmed
- Sad – especially if people were hurt or killed
- Guilty – for things you didn't do, or for having survived
- Ashamed or embarrassed – you may feel embarrassed at needing others for support
- Angry – at what happened, the injustice and senselessness
- Hopeful – that your life will return to normal

As well as emotional response individuals may experience the following physical and mental sensations:

- Tiredness
- Sleeplessness and bad dreams
- Loss of concentration
- Dizziness, palpitations, shakes
- Difficulty in breathing
- Tension headaches and backaches
- Change in sexual interest
- Loss of appetite

What you can do

- Give yourself time. It can take a few weeks or even months to accept what has happened and to learn to live with it. You may need to grieve for what (or who) you have lost.
- Find out what happened. It is better to face the reality of what happened rather than wondering about what might have happened.
- Be involved with other survivors. If you go to funerals or memorial services, this may help you to come to terms with what has happened. It can help to spend time with others who have been through the same experience as you.
- Ask for support. It can be a relief to talk about what happened. You may need to ask your friends and family for the time to do this – at first they will probably not know what to say or do.
- Take some time for yourself. At times you may want to be alone or only be with those close to you.
- Get into a routine. Even if you don't feel much like eating, try to have regular meals and to eat a balanced diet. Taking some exercise can help – but start gently.