

Flashbacks – might occur without warning at any time or place. These may be brought on, for example, by a smell, a sound or something you see.

Fears or anxieties – of the place, other reminders of the incident, of the dark and of being alone or in crowded places.

Physical symptoms – you might experience tiredness, loss of memory, palpitations (rapid heartbeat), dizziness, shaking, aching muscles, nausea (feeling sick) and diarrhoea, loss of concentration, breathing difficulties or a choking feeling in your throat and chest.

Do

- Give yourself time.
- Take time out to sleep, rest and relax.
- Tell people what you need and ask for support.
- Try to find someone you trust to talk over the event, more than once. If you were part of a group of people, get together and talk, support, listen and try to understand how others feel and what they are experiencing.
- Take care at home or when driving or riding - accidents are more common after a traumatic or stressful event.
- Get into a routine and do some normal things with other people.

Don't

- Bottle up your feelings - Strong feelings are natural. Don't feel embarrassed about them. Bottling them up can make you feel worse and can damage your health. Let yourself talk about what has happened and how you feel, and don't worry if you cry.
- Take on too much - Being active can take your mind off what has happened, but you need time to think to go over what happened so you can come to terms with it. Take some time to get back to your old routine.
- Drink or use 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 and other health problems.
- Make any major life changes - Try to put off any big decisions. Your judgement may not be at its best and you may make choices you later regret. Take advice from people you trust.

Do I need professional help?

Family and friends will probably be able to see you through this difficult time. Many people find the feelings they experience after a traumatic event gradually reduce after about a month. However, see your GP, or call a support group like the Samaritans, if your feelings are too much for you, or go on for too long.

Common reactions to traumatic events

This leaflet tells you about common reactions to traumatic events and explains ways to cope with them

What is a traumatic event?

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A traumatic event is any incident we experience which is sudden and unexpected which can result in emotional as well as physical trauma (injury) and shock.

This emotional shock can cause stress reactions, which are known as Post Traumatic Stress Reaction. However, the emotions you experience are a normal reaction to an unusual or abnormal event, that is to say, it is not an everyday event experienced by everyone.

How may I react to and feel after a traumatic event?

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To feel you are not able to cope is normal. Sometimes we do not want to let others know we can't cope as we fear we will be seen as being weak. We *'keep a stiff upper lip'* and try to carry on. The following are some common reactions you may experience when you have dealt with, or been involved in, such an incident.

Shock:

- disbelief and numbness
- the experience appears unreal
- a slow realisation of what has happened

Fear of:

- it happening again (looking for signs of danger)
- vulnerability (not feeling safe)
- being alone
- losing control
- helplessness

Sadness:

- about possible loss of life
- loss of belief that the world is a safe place

Anger:

- towards those who caused it to happen
- at the injustice and senselessness
- at the lack of understanding of others
- at it happening – why me?
- general anger

Confusion because:

- of strange feelings
- something in your past is troubling you again
- your world has changed

These feelings are normal and common, you may feel all or some of them. Expressing them can be a relief.

They usually only last for short periods at a time and gradually reduce.

How might this affect my behaviour?

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You might have some of the following physical and emotional symptoms:

Apprehension – you may find that you are easily startled and agitated.

Problems with sleeping – you may have disturbed sleep, disturbing thoughts preventing you sleeping or dreams and nightmares.

Mood swings – you might experience a change in mood for no obvious reason.

(Cont.)