



Bundesamt
für Bevölkerungsschutz
und Katastrophenhilfe

How to cope with stressful events

Englisch



Recommendations for people affected

This information brochure may give you some useful advice on how to cope with your present situation.

Possible Reactions

Extremely stressful events such as accidents, acts of violence or disasters can cause powerful reactions and feelings in those directly affected. This can also pertain to eye-witnesses or relatives as well as to rescue and relief workers.

Immediate reactions can be:

- Helplessness
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feelings of guilt
- Severe mood changes
- Inability to function in daily life

These and similar reactions are common after an extremely stressful event. Usually, they subside within a few days. However, sometimes additional symptoms may appear, such as:

- Memory lapses, difficulties in concentration
- Stressful memories or images continue to intrude
- Insomnia, nightmares
- Feelings of futility, hopelessness
- Loss of appetite, severe fatigue



BBK. Gemeinsam handeln. Sicher leben.

- Increased use of alcohol or sedatives
- Panic, jumpiness or edginess

These reactions usually diminish in the weeks after the event until they eventually disappear.

What can you do?

After experiencing a stressful event, it might be supportive to have a break and take time to overcome and recover from what has happened.

- Pay attention to your needs and take care of them.
- Do not suppress your feelings, talk to someone you can trust.
- Try to return to your daily routine as soon as possible.
- Give yourself some time. Do not expect that time will erase your memories. Your current feelings will persist for quite a while.
- Do things you usually enjoyed before the stressful experience.
- If possible try to relax.
- Do not hesitate to seek psychological and mental help.

How can family and friends help?

Family members and friends play a very important role in helping the person to deal with the stressful event. Just the fact that the person concerned does not feel alone can have a positive impact. If the person who has experienced a stressful event wants to talk then:

- Listen.
- Take time for him/her.
- Take his/her feelings seriously.

In some cases, it might be necessary to take care of things on behalf of the person affected. Support is certainly helpful and often crucial. It is, however, most important to assist the affected person to return to his/her daily routine as soon as possible.



When is professional help needed?

It can happen that the person is so severely affected by an event, that it is advisable to seek professional help. This is particularly the case if the reactions described earlier persist for more than 4 weeks.

Warning signals:

- Your reactions and emotions are not returning back to the usual.
- You persistently experience nightmares or suffer from insomnia.
- You frequently have unwanted memories of the event.
- You avoid certain situations or places that remind you of the event or show any connection with it.
- You consume (more) alcohol, drugs or take a large amount of medication.
- Your job performance is affected.
- The relationship to your partner is significantly affected or you suffer from sexual problems.
- You have no one to talk to about your feelings, even though you feel the need to talk.

Take these signs seriously. If you are experiencing them, please seek professional help to avoid more severe disorder. There are a number of institutions available to assist you, among them outreach clinics, psychotherapists, spiritual counsellors, physicians or trauma experts.



For additional information please contact:

Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz
und Katastrophenhilfe (BBK)
Provinzialstrasse 93, 53127 Bonn
Postfach 1867, 53008 Bonn
Telefon: +49(0)228-99550-0
poststelle@bbk.bund.de
www.bbk.bund.de

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Telefon
Telefax
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