



COPING WITH A TRAUMATIC INCIDENT

You have just had a terrible experience. Whether you were involved in the traumatic incident yourself or you are a co-worker, family member or friend, you may be experiencing very powerful emotional stress. This stress level could be beyond what you are expected to cope with in your normal daily living. That is why some difficult physical and/or emotional reactions or responses are possible (but not predictable). These reactions are normal responses to a highly stressful and abnormal event. These reactions may be difficult, but it is important to understand that they are normal.

What are common responses?

Physical changes may include fatigue, headaches, heartburn, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and loss or increase in appetite. In addition, immediate physical reactions could also include:

- Crying
- Nausea
- Muscle tremors
- Shock symptoms (weak pulse, glassy eyes)
- Sweating
- Chills
- Dizziness
- Chest pain

Changes to thoughts and feelings, which may include confusion, anxiety, fear, denial or numbness, despair, depression, anger, outrage, grief, withdrawal, and feelings of helplessness. Poor concentration, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts are also common, normal responses.

There might also be delayed reactions, including:

- Fear
- Chronic fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Moodiness
- Difficulties concentrating
- Increased substance use
- Suspiciousness
- Apathy
- Decreased work performance
- Frustration
- Flashbacks
- Memory problems
- Cynicism

- Relationship problems
- Guilt
- Isolation

When will I feel these things, and how long will they last?

- They usually happen immediately and over time the stress responses change in intensity, frequency, duration and character.
- The time it takes for emotional “wounds” to heal varies. Much like the flu, traumatic stress reactions run their course. No one can deny that this is a difficult experience, but it is important to know the reactions are normal and will ease in time.

What can I do to feel better?

- The passing of time will help, and talking things out could help too. However, for some talking helps but others would rather not talk about it, and that is normal too.
- Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress. Connect with your social supports such as family, friends, support group, pets.
- Avoid alcohol and drug abuse. Alcohol is a depressant and both alcohol and drugs can prolong the pain of the traumatic event.
- Avoid caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant, which makes it harder to relax and stay calm.
- Take good care of yourself by eating healthy foods, exercising (within your limits), and getting plenty of rest. Find other forms of self-care, like taking a bath, getting a massage, writing in a journal, creating art, or listening to music.

What if I begin to feel worse?

Sometimes, the intensity of your reactions increases or a reaction may be very prolonged. This does not mean that you are weak or going “crazy.” It simply means that the event was so powerful that it pushed you far past your normal coping experiences. If things get worse, seek help from someone who can assist you.

Do you need more help?

Don't be afraid to reach out for more help. If you're not sure who to talk to, consider calling **Timmins Family Counselling Centre** to learn more about trauma and if counselling is right for you.

You can reach us at **705-267-7333**.

You can also visit our website at www.timminsfamilycounselling.com