

When should a person seek help?

In the early stages, psychological professional help is not usually necessary or recommended.

Many people recover naturally from these events.

However, some people may need additional support to help them cope. For example people who have had other traumatic events happen to them, have a lot of recent stress, and people with previous mental health difficulties may be more vulnerable.

If about a month after the event anyone is still experiencing the following difficulties, it is a good idea to visit their GP for advice:

- Feeling upset and fearful most of the time
- Acting very differently to before the trauma
- Not being able to work or look after the home and family
- Having deteriorating relationship difficulties
- Using drugs or drinking too much
- Feeling very jumpy and having nightmares a lot
- Still not being able to stop thinking about the incidents
- Still not being able to enjoy life at all

What kind of help is available?

Most people will spontaneously recover after a few days or weeks.

Having more formal support and talking through with the Critical Care Unit Consultant Clinical Psychologist can help if the effects last longer than a few weeks.

If the GP feels it is appropriate, they may refer you to other professionals such as a counsellor in the GP practice, to a community mental health team or another service.

A small number of people may be referred to specialist trauma services.

Psychological interventions for trauma can vary but generally their aim is to enable people to come to terms with the traumatic event, by exploring feelings and fears, talking it through and helping people to develop coping mechanisms.

Medication can at times be recommended and be helpful in treating symptoms.

Further support

www.cardiffcriticalcare.co.uk

*Adapted from:
The Cardiff & Vale, NHS Traumatic Stress Service, Cardiff, Wales*

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Patient and carer information

Coping after a traumatic event



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Coping after a traumatic event

This is a brief information sheet for anyone who has experienced directly or witnessed a traumatic incident.

Reactions are likely to be strongest in those directly involved in the incident, and who directly witnessed any aftermath.

Common reactions after a traumatic event

The following responses are normal and to be expected in the first few weeks:

- Emotional reactions such as feeling afraid, sad, horrified, helpless, overwhelmed, angry, confused, numb or disorientated
- Distressing thoughts and images that just pop into your head
- Nightmares
- Disturbed sleep or insomnia
- Feeling Anxious
- Low mood

These responses are a normal part of recovery and are the mind's mechanisms of trying to make sense and come to terms with what happened. They should subside over time.

If you were a patient in critical care immediately after the traumatic incident then this reaction might be delayed due to the effects of treatment, but may emerge when you are no longer sedated.

What can people do to cope?

The most helpful way of coping is to be with people you feel close to and normally spend time with.

- If it helps, talk to someone you feel comfortable with (friends, family, co-workers) about how you are feeling. Talk at your pace and as much as you feel it's useful.
- Be willing to listen to others who may need to talk about how they feel.
- Take time to grieve and cry if you need to. Letting feelings out is helpful in the long run.
- Ask for emotional and practical support from friends, family, your community or religious centre.

- Try to return to everyday routines and habits. They can be comforting and help you feel less out of sorts.
- Look after yourself - eat and sleep well, exercise and relax.
- Try to spend some time doing something that feels good and that you enjoy.

Be understanding about yourself and accept it may take a while to get back to normal.