

Emotional Aftermath of Disasters

How we deal with a disaster

Each person's experience of and feelings about a disaster are unique; some people may experience problems because of it and others may not. We recommend that all those directly affected by a disaster should visit their GP. Although everyone responds in different ways at different times following a trauma, it may be useful to have on your record that you have been involved in a disaster.

Some of the more common reactions to a traumatic event include loss of appetite or sleepless nights, difficulty in concentrating, feeling anxious, angry or on edge, difficulty in relating to family or friends who have not shared your experience, as well as re-living the disaster and vivid memories. Such reactions are not abnormal and are your mind and body's way of making sense of what happened. However, if these reactions persist or are disturbing then it may be sensible to access help in dealing with them.

When reactions persist they can sometimes develop into a recognised psychological disorder. This could be a depressive illness or an anxiety disorder, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Getting a diagnosis from your GP or a psychiatrist can feel stigmatising and you may be worried about how this will affect your work, your relationships and your sense of who you are. However, if you have developed a post traumatic disorder then it is important you get the right treatment and support. Getting a diagnosis from a doctor can help in terms of having a traumatic experience recognised, in getting access to specialist mental health services for effective treatment, and in receiving compensation. The good news is that post traumatic disorders (whether PTSD, depression or anxiety) are very treatable with evidence-based psychological therapies. You can read more about these at the website of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Your GP service can act as a gateway to mental health services and specialist treatment, if necessary.

Traumatic Bereavement

When someone you love dies in a disaster then you are faced with the trauma of the event and the grief of bereavement. Things will never get back to normal and the idea of recovery or moving on may feel alien and insensitive. Grieving is hard work in any circumstances but there can be particular challenges when the bereavement is the result of a disaster. If you were also involved in the disaster, you may wish you had died too and/or feel guilt at surviving when your loved one did not. You may have distressing memories of the disaster and what happened to you and your loved one. If you weren't involved in the disaster you may still have disturbing thoughts and pictures about the disaster perhaps from the media coverage of the event, or just from your imagination. These memories or images can be very distressing and can make it hard for you to find happy memories of your loved one. The sadness of loss can be complicated by feelings of anger, guilt or confusion. Trauma can keep people trapped in the first terrible moment of discovering that their loved one is dead. It gets in the way of grieving, blocking the process by which we try to find a way to live on without the person we love.

If you have any of the post traumatic reactions described above, or feel that you're stuck in that terrible first moment of grief then consider talking to your GP or to an organisation like CRUSE bereavement care. They will be able to discuss what support is available for you at this very difficult time.

Useful links and resources

Support Groups and Caring Organisations

Anxiety and Traumatic Stress Clinic

Specialists in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Provide assessment and therapy for those in London who have been affected by traumatic events such as disasters.
Telephone: 020 3228 2657.

<https://www.national.slam.nhs.uk/services/camhs/anxiety-traumatic-stress-clinic/>

Assist Trauma Care

If you or a member of your family have been affected by a trauma as a result of a disaster and would like to discuss whether therapy from ASSIST can help you, please telephone **01788 551919** or Email admin@assisttraumacare.org.uk.

<http://assisttraumacare.org.uk>

BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

BACP can help you find a therapist using their BACP Register and therapist directory. You can search their register and directory here:

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/how-to-find-a-therapist/>

<https://www.bacp.co.uk>

Compassionate Friends

Organisation of bereaved parents offering shared experience (with local groups throughout the country) and series of leaflets.

National UK helpline 0345 123 2304

<http://www.tcf.org.uk>

Cruse - Bereavement Care

Cruse is a charity for bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It offers face-to-face, telephone, email and website support.

Helpline 0808 808 1677

<http://www.cruse.org.uk>

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Provides free care to bereaved people.

Helpline 0845 600 2227 (calls cost 5p per minute plus your phone company's access charge)

<http://www.crusescotland.org.uk/>

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

NICE publishes guidelines for the treatment of disorders and conditions on the NHS. One of these guidelines relates to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). You can access information on the PTSD guideline using the link.

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg26>

Samaritans

Provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional support 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

National helpline 08457 909090

<http://www.samaritans.org.uk>

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (Traumatic Stress service)

Provides a clinical service for people suffering from PTSD. Telephone: 0203 228 6000.

<http://www.slam.nhs.uk>

UK Psychological Trauma Society

The UKPTS is a multidisciplinary society which aims to promote evidence-based care for those who suffer traumatic stress related mental health and foster a greater understanding of the effects of traumatic events. Their website provides access to a selection of material for the general public and for health professionals about post-traumatic stress reactions and includes information about trauma services across the UK.

<http://www.ukpts.co.uk>

Victim Support

Offers practical help and advice and emotional support to victims of crime and their families. Support line: 0808 1689 111.

<http://www.victimsupport.org.uk>