Coping with a Traumatic Event

A traumatic event is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that affects someone emotionally. Traumatic events can include:

- Disasters like storm, flood, fire
- Death of someone close, especially sudden and unexpected death
- Serious illness
- Stressful family events (divorce, move, homelessness, breakups, absence or incarceration of a family member)
- Experiencing or witnessing violence
- Fears for personal or family safety
- Physical pain or injury
- Prison
- Bullying, harassment or abuse
- Sexual violence or abuse

There are many different responses to potentially traumatic events. Most people have intense responses immediately following, and often for several weeks or even months after, a traumatic event. These responses can include:

- Feeling anxious, sad, or angry
- Trouble concentrating and sleeping
- Continually thinking about what happened

For most people, these are normal and expected responses and generally lessen with time. Healthy ways of coping in this time period include avoiding alcohol and other drugs, spending time with loved ones and trusted friends who are supportive, trying to maintain normal routines for meals, exercise, and sleep. In general, staying active is a good way to cope with stressful feelings.

In some cases, the stressful thoughts and feelings after a trauma continue for a long time and interfere with everyday life. For people who continue to feel the effects of the trauma, it is important to seek professional help. Some signs that an individual may benefit from help include:

- Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
- Crying often
- Having trouble thinking clearly
- Having frightening thoughts, reliving the experience
- Feeling angry
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding places or people that bring back disturbing memories & responses

Physical responses to trauma may also mean that an individual needs help. Physical symptoms may include:

- Stomach pain and digestive issues
- Headaches
- Being very jumpy & easily startled
- Feeling tired
- Racing heart & sweating
What Can You Do for Yourself?

There are many things you can do to cope with traumatic events.

- **Understand that what you are feeling may be a normal reaction to an abnormal situation, especially right after the trauma**
- **Keep to your usual routine as much as possible**
- **Limit media consumption about traumatic events**, and consider reducing social media time
- What has helped before? Past sources of support will usually help again. Many people mention faith, music and arts, activities with friends, yoga, meditation, nature, pets, and physical activity as important in recovery. Use what works for you
- Find ways to relax and be kind to yourself
- Take the time to resolve day-to-day conflicts so they do not add to your stress
- Limit use of alcohol and non-prescription drugs
- Turn to trusted family, friends, and clergy for support, and talk about your experiences and feelings with them
- Participate in leisure and recreational activities. Physical activity, from intentional exercise to taking a walk is healthy and helpful
- Recognize that you cannot control everything and focus on what you are able to do
- Taking constructive action to improve the world is a way to regain a sense of control and feel good about yourself
- Recognize when there is a need for trained help, and call a local mental health center

What Can You Do for Your Child?

Recognize that children may experience stress more in their bodies (for example, a tummyache), and express it in behavior more than in words. The may temporarily revert to less mature behaviors. Ways to help a child:

- Provide reassurance and a sense of safety. Let them know you love and care for them. Your child may want to feel that with reassuring touch and hugs
- Let your child know that it is okay to feel upset when something bad or scary happens
- Encourage your child to express feelings and thoughts, without making judgments Children may express themselves in play and artwork rather than in words
- Return to daily routines

Information is adapted from:
RESOURCES

If you or someone you know continues to experience distressing reactions to a traumatic event, or they are interfering with your ability to work, learn, carry out normal activities, and engage in satisfying relationships, help is available.

Your employer may have a confidential Employee Assistance Program to provide support for all kinds of stress-related issues. Check with your HR or Personnel department.

For children in school, school nurses and counsellors are great resources.

**Your primary care physician.** Be sure to tell them about the way the stress is affecting your emotions and thoughts, in addition to any physical symptoms.

**Bridgeway Crisis Intervention**
Hudson County residents age 18 and older who are experiencing a mental health crisis or a worsening of a mental health disorder. Referrals are accepted by phone as well as walk-ins: Mon - Fri 9am-8pm, Sat & Sun 10am-6pm, 152 Central Avenue at Prospect St.  
(201) 885-2539  bridgewayrehab.com

**For a serious and immediate crisis**
- 911
- **Mobile Crisis Team**  (866) 367-6023
  24-hour Mobile Response Service to Hudson County children or adults in need of emergency psychiatric evaluation.
- **Your hospital emergency room**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
“We can all help prevent suicide. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.”  
(800) 273-8255  suicidepreventionlifeline.org

**2ndfloor.org**
Confidential and anonymous helpline for New Jersey's youth and young adults. “We are here to help you find solutions to the problems that you face and we are available 24/7 365 days a year.”  (888) 222-2228