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*"Psychotherapy for healing and growth"*

## WHAT IS TRAUMATIC STRESS?

Traumatic stress responses may occur after experiencing or witnessing an event in which there was actual or threatened death or serious injury. During or soon after the event, there are feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror. As time passes, a person may continue to feel quite anxious, sad, and despairing, and may have unwanted dreams or imagery of the event during waking hours (flashbacks). For others, most feelings may be numb. An individual may withdraw from others and/or turn to drugs or alcohol for solace. If you have experienced a traumatic event and have symptoms similar to these, it is important to remember that **YOU ARE NOT GOING CRAZY!** These are all common responses to life trauma. There is help. Read on . . .

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## COPING WITH TRAUMATIC STRESS

Sometimes it is possible to resolve these symptoms adequately by talking out your feelings with family or friends, by resuming your usual life routines as soon as you are able, and by seeking support and solace from your religious faith or other spiritual resources. Here are some practical suggestions:

1. “It’s Okay. . .” - Remember that your reactions are normal human responses to very stressful events. Like a common virus, symptoms often must run their course for healing to occur. Unwanted thoughts, dreams, and images are a part of the healing process and should decrease over time. Be compassionate and accepting of yourself and your situation.
2. Stay In Touch With Others - Reach out and talk to others who are able to listen and accept your feelings with understanding and compassion. Let caring family members, friends, co-workers, and clergy help you.
3. Stay Active - Maintain your normal, active schedule as much as possible. Regular exercise (within your limits) is a great way to cope with emotionally overwhelming situations. Do things that you enjoy.
4. Help Others - Find ways to contribute to others who have had similar experiences as yours.
5. Take Care of Yourself - Minimize stressors. Take time to relax. Eat well. Get plenty of rest.

## WARNING SIGNS

Here are some warning signs that your traumatic stress response is unresolved:

- Continued, unbidden, distressing memories or images and dreams of the event.
- Withdrawal from others to whom you were previously close.
- Diminished interest in or participation in significant activities.
- Feeling jumpy, anxious, or fearful out of proportion to the current situation.
- Unremitting and intense feelings such as grief, anger, self-blame, shame, guilt.
- Constant or compulsive avoidance of reminders of the event.
- Low energy, tearfulness, difficulty sleeping, loss of pleasure, meaning, hope.
- Increased health problems and concerns.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs or other compulsive behaviors such as binge eating, excessive shopping, or gambling.
- Inability to recall important aspects of the trauma.
- Inability to access and be soothed by spiritual resources that were meaningful and comforting before the trauma.

## HELP IS AVAILABLE

If your symptoms persist after diligently applying the coping strategies listed and are causing you significant problems in relationships and/or on the job, or if you just feel lousy, it may be useful to consult with a psychotherapist knowledgeable about the psychological impact of traumatic life events.

Psychotherapy is indicated when the demands of home, work life, and relationships become overwhelming. Psychotherapy offers help and hope to those who want to change their ways of thinking, feeling, and being in the world.

Dr. Debra Neumann has received special training in helping survivors of traumatic life events. She received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, in 1992 and subsequently completed 2 years of post-doctoral training at The Traumatic Stress Institute (TSI) in South Windsor, CT. At TSI she received intensive training and experience in working with survivors of many kinds of life trauma. In 1994, she relocated to the Greater Sacramento area, where she practiced until 2005. She is currently maintains a private practice in Maryland, with offices in Bethesda and Friendship Heights.

For more information or to make an appointment, call Dr. Neumann at (301) 320 - 4446.