

When Coping with a Distressing Event

The way you are affected by a distressing event may be different than what you see happening with others.

Fear and anger. Lack of, or limited control over, events in one's life can lead to anger at whoever or whatever caused the event to happen. You may find your future more worrisome.

Depression and guilt. A sense of helplessness or hopelessness can precede depression, especially if there is no immediate remedy to the problem. You may experience guilt when you feel you could have, or should have, prevented what happened.

Feeling vulnerable and insecure. Intense feelings of being susceptible and unguarded reflect a need to ensure a sense of safety and of having some stability. You might not be confident of your ability to cope.

Relationship difficulties. Conflict with others may emerge. You may resent others, even if they had nothing to do with the distressing event.

Past traumas emerge. This may happen even though you felt that you had resolved those issues or they seem unrelated to the present stress.

Recovery process. Periods of being sad or disbelieving come with a need to focus on the event. These may alternate with times of humor and acceptance.

Mental distraction. You might experience confusion and have difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly.

How you can help yourself:

- **Be patient and accepting.** Do this for yourself and others. Don't judge your responses as right or wrong.
- **Return to routine** Take comfort in normal activities. Be sure to get adequate sleep, exercise and nutrition.
- **Tell others what you need.** Family, friends and others need to know what is helpful and what is not. Let them offer their support and comfort.
- **Take time to reflect.** Spend some time getting in touch with your source of spiritual faith. Meditation, reflection and prayer can provide emotional healing and solace at such a time.

When to call for help:

- If you find your life is being disrupted (work, relationships, etc.).
- You cannot find a way to express the feelings that overwhelm you.
- You aren't sure if the way you are reacting is "normal."
- You are using alcohol or other drugs to cope.

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