



Self-Care after a traumatic experience

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We live in a world where traumatic experiences are not few and far between. Almost everyone (if not everyone) is likely to experience some form of trauma. And not just once in a lifetime. People can expect to face traumatic situations many times in their lives, unfortunately. The experience of trauma is an individual one. People do not respond in the same way. The same traumatic situation can cause different responses in people depending on age, gender, socioeconomic status, support available, health care resources at their disposal, the state of their close relationships, and general health and wellbeing. The experience of trauma is unique to each person.

The types of situations that can cause trauma can be quite different. The usual ones we think of as traumatic such as hijacking, assault, armed robbery, and rape very much still happen. Other situations which can also be experienced as traumatic include job losses, relationships ending / divorce, financial struggles, serious health problems, abuse at home or in the workplace, experiencing environmental disasters such as flooding or cyclones, and the death of loved ones. Many people experience traumatic situations, and lots of people are walking around with the aftereffects of traumatic incidents. If you are fortunate, you may have good support and be able to get help in order to overcome the trauma and move on. Many people are not able to get the help they need, and some are not even aware they are traumatised.

Trauma has a substantial impact on our lives. People who are traumatised have anxiety. They may experience flashbacks and intrusive memories. They often isolate themselves. Sometimes memory and thinking ability is negatively impacted. Often relationships are affected as the traumatised person struggles to socialise, battles to manage anxiety, and often becomes very angry and lashes out at others. People who are not able to maintain a relationship or hold down a job, are often people with underlying trauma.

So, what can you do if you are someone who has experienced trauma or is still carrying the effects of traumatic experiences in your life. Ideally, you want to go and get professional help. It is still the best thing to do. However, it is not always available to people. There are, however, some self-care tips you can follow to help you overcome what is a horrible, although commonplace, experience.

Actions you can take to help yourself after a traumatic experience

1. Talk to friends and family as soon after the event as you can. You may not want to contact others, but don't stay all by yourself and keep it all to yourself. Even someone just sitting with

you can help you process what happened. That experience of a caring person nearby makes a big difference.

2. Don't isolate yourself. Speak to friends who you know will understand and support you. A lot of the negative effects of trauma can be healed through strong supportive relationships with someone who understands what you are going through and who cares about you.
3. Join a support group. As anyone who has experienced a traumatic event will tell you, there is nothing more comforting than someone else around you who has been through the same experience. All trauma survivors know that others who have had the same experience "just get what they are going through" and therefore can understand them in a way that no one else can.
4. Talk through your experiences. Write or journal about your experiences. This helps to get it out, it helps you process the emotions, and can also help stop the flashbacks which often occur because of the need to try and understand exactly what happened. During a traumatic event the stress hormones released by the brain are so high that they interfere with the laying down of memories. Bits of memories get stored. This is why you can remember a smell, or some clothing, and other parts of the experience. It takes telling and retelling the story, and writing and rewriting the story, for the brain to piece together everything into a whole memory to be stored. If you want to play / act your experience you can do that. It is not pleasant to revisit the traumatic event, but the only way out of this is through it.
5. Try and not get involved in events that could lead to more trauma. You do need to face what happened, but don't go and inflict more trauma on yourself. You do want a quiet and restful period post trauma to recover.
6. Set yourself goals and start off small. Trauma can make you feel helpless. Achieving goals can help you feel more empowered and capable. Start with simple tasks that you need to do. For example, you can paint a wall. Or go and sort out your ID or passport documents. Or do some work in the garden. You could also clean out a cupboard in the house. This will help you feel a sense of purpose and help you feel productive.
7. Look after your health. Exercise, eat nutritious food, sleep well, and stay hydrated.
8. Get back into your routine of your regular life as soon as you are ready too.
9. Actions such as meditation, mindfulness, deep breathing, yoga, tai chi, or even just repeating a mantra can help.
10. Make time for things you enjoy in life. You do still have things working for you and you can still celebrate.

Our choices influence the quality of our lives. We get to make the choices. When we make the right ones, things just go better for us. The right choice is not always the easiest choice. But it leads us to where we want to be. You don't want to be carrying around trauma because it makes it difficult to relate to people and difficult to focus and concentrate on living your life to the full. You don't want the aftereffects of the trauma to run your life. You want to run your life according to your goals and purpose. So, if you have had a traumatic experience then try some of these tips. If you are seriously traumatised, then seek professional help.