

# Coping

*with a  
traumatic event*

**WSIB**

Workplace Safety &  
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ONTARIO

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Commission de la sécurité  
professionnelle et de l'assurance  
contre les accidents du travail

After witnessing a traumatic event, you can expect to experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. In some cases, you might suffer both emotional and physical reactions.

- Stress reactions can occur at any point ranging from immediately after the event, a few hours after the event or even a few days or a few months after the event.
- There is no hard and fast rule regarding stress reaction. The symptoms might last a few days, weeks or months depending on the severity of the traumatic event and your ability to cope.
- It is important to remember that you have just witnessed a major traumatic event and it is completely normal not to feel yourself. There are various physical, mental, emotional and behavioural symptoms that may occur as a result of the trauma. If you are at all concerned about your reactions, it is a good idea to consult a physician.
- With the understanding and support of loved ones, stress reactions usually pass quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so overwhelming that professional assistance from a counsellor may be necessary.

## What Can I Do to Lessen the Stress?

- Within the first 24 to 48 hours, periods of appropriate physical activity, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time – keep busy.
- Don't label yourself as being crazy – you are normal and having a normal reaction.
- Talk to people – talk is healing.
- Don't try to numb the pain by overusing drugs or alcohol.
- Reach out – people do care.
- Try to maintain a normal schedule.
- Spend time with others.
- Talk to your co-workers. Sharing your feelings with others that have suffered the same trauma can be helpful.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten.
- Keep a journal – write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do something nice for yourself.
- Realize that those around you are also under stress.
- Don't make any big lifestyle changes.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life. This can be as simple as deciding what you would like to eat.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks. They are normal and will decrease over time and eventually become less painful.
- Eat regular, well-balanced meals (even if you don't feel like it).

## For Family Members and Friends:

- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Listen carefully.
- Offer your assistance – even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Assist them with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, caring for the family or minding the children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't make statements such as "It could have been worse". These types of comments are not consoling and are never helpful.
- Remember that your loved one has just suffered a very painful event. Tell them you love them; you are sorry that this happened; and you want to understand and help them in any way that you can.

This information is available in several languages by calling: **1-800-465-5606** or TTY (telephone device for the deaf) **1-800-387-0050**