

Practical Ideas for Coping with Trauma

Other victims and survivors of traumatic disasters who have been where you are have offered some practical suggestions of things you can do to help you cope and begin to heal:

- Remember to breathe. Sometimes when people are afraid or very upset, they stop breathing. When you are scared or upset, close your eyes and take deep, slow breaths until you calm down. Taking a walk or talking to a close friend can also help.
- Whenever possible, delay making any major decisions. You may think a big change will make you feel better, but it will not necessarily ease the pain. Give yourself time to get through the most hectic times and to adjust before making decisions that will affect the rest of your life.
- Simplify your life for a while. Make a list of the things you are responsible for, such as taking care of the kids, buying groceries, teaching Sunday school, or going to work. Then, look at your list and see which things are absolutely necessary. Is there anything you can put aside for a while? Are there things you can let go of completely?
- Take care of your mind and body. Eat healthy food. Exercise regularly, even if it is only a long walk every day. Exercise will help lift depression and help you sleep better, too. Massages can also help release tension and comfort you.
- Avoid using alcohol and other drugs. These substances may temporarily block the pain, but they will keep you from healing. You have to experience your feelings and look clearly at your life to recover from tragedy.
- Keep the phone number of a good friend nearby to call when you feel overwhelmed or have a panic attack.
- Talk to a counselor, clergy member, friend, family member, or other survivors about what happened. It is common to want to share your experience over and over again—and it can be helpful for you to do so.
- Begin to restore order in your world by reestablishing old routines at work, home, or school as much as possible. Stay busy with work that occupies your mind, but do not throw yourself into frantic activity.
- Ask questions. You may have concerns about what types of assistance are available, who will pay for your travel and other expenses, and other issues concerning compensation and insurance. Find out what will be expected of you in the days to come so you can plan ahead for any new or stressful circumstances.
- Talk to your children, who are often the invisible victims, and make sure they are part of your reactions, activities, and plans. Involve them in funerals and memorials if they want to be involved.

- Organize and plan how you will deal with the media. It may be helpful to include family, friends, or other victims or survivors in your planning process. You do NOT have to speak to the media. It is up to you to decide how much, if any, involvement you will have with the media. Any contact should be on your terms.
- Seek the help of a reputable attorney if you think you need legal advice. Take time to make decisions about insurance settlements, legal actions, and other matters that have long-term consequences.
- Rely on people you trust. Seek information, advice, and help from them. Remember that although most people are honest and trustworthy, some unscrupulous individuals will try to take advantage of victims in the aftermath of a disaster.
- Avoid doing upsetting things right before bed if you are having trouble sleeping. Designate 30 minutes sometime earlier in the day as your “worry time.” Do not go to bed before you are tired. Write down your fears and nightmares. Put on quiet music or relaxation tapes. If you still cannot sleep, do not get mad at yourself and worry about not getting sleep. You can still rest by lying quietly and listening to relaxing music or by reading a good book. If your sleeping problems continue, you may want to see your doctor.
- Find small ways to help others, as it will help ease your own suffering.
- Ask for help from family, friends, or professionals when you need it. Healing grief and loss is similar to healing your body after an illness or accident. Just as there are doctors and nurses who are trained to help heal the body, there are professionals who are trained to help people recover from loss and cope with emotional pain.
- Think about the things that give you hope. Make a list of these things and turn to them on bad days.

It is important to remember that emotional pain is not endless. It does have limits. The pain will eventually ease, and the joys of life will return. There will be an ebb and flow to your grief. When it is there, let yourself feel it. When it is gone, let it go. You are not responsible or obligated to keep the pain alive. Smiles, laughter, and the ability to feel joy in the good things of life will return in time.

Victims are forever changed by the experience of terrorism. They realize that although things will never be the same, they can face life with new understanding and new meaning. Many things have been lost, but many things remain. Overcoming even the greatest tragedies is possible and can help bring about change and hope for others.

http://ojp.gov/ovc/publications/infores/cat_hndbk/cat_hndbk_2.htm