

Signs you might need professional support

You might need help if you have been experiencing any of the reactions listed below for several weeks and things are not getting better.

- You want to talk about what happened and feel you don't have anyone to speak to.
- You are easily startled and agitated.
- You are experiencing vivid images of what you saw and having intense emotional reactions to them.
- You have disturbed sleep, with disturbing thoughts stopping you from sleeping or dreams and nightmares.
- You experience overwhelming emotions that you feel unable to cope with or experience changes in mood for no obvious reason.
- You are suffering from tiredness, loss of memory, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, shaking, aching muscles, feeling sick, diarrhoea, poor concentration, breathing difficulties or a choking feeling in your throat and chest.
- You feel emotionally numb.
- Relationships are being impacted.
- You are worried about your alcohol or drug use.
- Your performance at work has suffered.
- Someone close to you tells you they are concerned.

If you need help, contact your GP.

Support available

Your GP can provide you with support or refer you to the appropriate service this could include:

- trust mental health services
- counselling services

You can find out more about mental health and wellbeing, including local support services by visiting www.mindingyourhead.info

You can also find useful resources on the HSC's Bereavement Network at:
<https://bereaved.hscni.net/bereavement-support/sudden-death/sudden-death/>

In a crisis you can call Lifeline or ask to speak with your GP urgently.

Lifeline is Northern Ireland's crisis response helpline for people experiencing distress or despair. Lifeline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. Calls to Lifeline are free.

For more information about Lifeline, including interpreting support, visit www.lifelinehelpline.info
In an emergency situation call 999 or go to your local Emergency Department.

Lifeline

0808 808 8000

This leaflet contains material adapted from the NHS leaflet *Coping with stress following a major incident*.

 **Public Health
Agency**

Public Health Agency
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:



08/25



Coping after a traumatic event

Information for adults

Being involved in, or affected by, a traumatic event can affect how we feel mentally and physically. It is important to understand how these incidents may impact on our thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and what to do if things don't get better.

This leaflet explains how people may feel after a recent trauma, and provides information on what might help and where to go for support.

 **Public Health
Agency**

Feelings after a traumatic event

Feeling distress after a traumatic experience is normal. Even if you were not directly involved in the event, you may still be emotionally impacted by it and your feelings are valid – don't dismiss them.

We all respond to traumatic events in different ways. People that have experienced the same event might react differently and have different needs.

Some common initial feelings after a traumatic event include:

- shock – being unable to connect with what is going on around you
- numbness – blocking feelings and withdrawing from your normal activities
- denial – being unable to accept what has happened, sometimes acting as it has not happened



Common feelings in the days and weeks after the event might include:

- sadness – particularly if someone was injured or killed
- anger – about what has happened or with whomever is responsible
- worry – that the same thing might happen again or that you will lose control of your feelings
- guilt – that you have survived when others have suffered or died
- shame or embarrassment – about the strength of your feelings and the support you need from others

Many people will be able to recover after a traumatic event with support from family, friends and their workplace, but sometimes professional help may be needed.



Things that might help after a traumatic event

In the days and weeks after an event there are things you can do to help yourself.

Look after your health and wellbeing

Take time out to get your normal amount of sleep, eat regularly and healthily, exercise, rest and relax.

Talk to people you trust

Talking about your experience and how you are feeling can help. Also tell people what support you need. Bottling up your thoughts is often unhelpful.

Keep life as normal as possible

Keep your normal routine, but reduce outside demands on you and avoid taking on extra responsibilities for the time being.

Be careful around the home and when driving

Accidents are more common after a traumatic or stressful event, take extra care.

Go to a place where you feel safe

Make the time to go over what happened in your mind when you are in a safe place. Don't force yourself to do this if the feelings are too strong.

Don't dismiss or avoid your feelings

Your thoughts and feelings about a traumatic event are normal reactions, don't get embarrassed by or dismiss these.