

ADULT PACKAGE

These handouts can be given to adult survivors of disasters. It helps with normalizing their experiences and identifies methods of coping.

CRISIS REACTION

A Normal Reaction to an Abnormal Situation

All of these feelings and reactions are normal and natural even though they may seem unusual and even though some are very different from others.

We are all individuals. We all respond in our own unique way.

The incident cannot be erased. The memory will always be a part of your life.

Everyone moves at their own pace through the stages of crisis and healing.
Everyone has their own clock.

For some people, there may be ongoing problems.

Possible Reactions:

Numbness	Flashbacks
Crying	Regression
Fatigue	Confusion
Sleep disturbances	Feeling overwhelmed
Change in appetite/weight	Feeling inadequate
Low resistance to illness	Frustration
Concentration problems	Helplessness
Memory problems	Irritability
Religious confusion	Depression
Loss of trust	Despair
Anniversary difficulties	Grief
Alcohol/drug abuse	Guilt
Excessive use of sick leave	Anger
Work/school/family problems	Outrage
Difficulty returning to normal activity level	Insecurity
Suicidal thoughts	Fear
Withdrawal	Anxiety
	Self-doubt

WHAT TO EXPECT AS RECOVERY CONTINUES

1. Survivors of trauma may experience periods when they alternate between anxiety and re-experiencing the incident and times when they are depressed and withdraw from family, friends, and important activities. The changes are normal and to be expected.
2. Situations which strongly remind the survivor of the incident will induce more distress. These situations might include reading certain articles in the newspaper, being in the area where the incident occurred, or being asked to retell the story.
3. It is not uncommon for hearings, trials, and other meetings related to the incident to increase post-trauma consequences.
4. Anniversaries of the event (one week, one month, one year, 10 years) may bring memories back and increase post-trauma consequences.
5. Families and friends become co-survivors and often experience post-trauma consequences.
6. Survivors should not expect that their life will return to “normal.” Rather, a successful recovery means managing post-trauma symptoms and finding a “new normal.”

POST-TRAUMA DEBRIEFING

Suggested Post-Trauma “Do’s and Don’ts”

Depending on the post-trauma incident and consequences, these are examples of coping skills for debriefing participants.

DON’T

Drink alcohol excessively.

Use legal or illegal substances to numb consequences.

Withdraw from significant others.

Stay away from work.

Reduce amount of leisure activities.

Have unrealistic expectations for recovery.

Look for easy answers.

DO

Get ample rest.

Maintain a good diet and exercise.

Take time for leisure activities.

Normalize post-trauma consequences.

Find and talk to supportive peers and/or family members about the incident.

Learn about post-traumatic stress disorder.

Spend time with family and friends.

Expect the incident to bother you.

Get extra help from a post-trauma counseling center if you need it.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT FLASHBACKS

1. **REMEMBER!** Flashbacks are normal after a critical incident. You are likely to experience more flashbacks if you believe that you are “going crazy” or “losing it.” Flashbacks will likely fade as you remind yourself that they are okay.
2. Flashbacks may follow a “trigger.” A trigger is an event or thought which reminds you of the traumatic incident. It is also possible that there will be no trigger. These flashbacks seem more scary because they are less easily explained.
3. Learn how to talk to yourself. When you have a flashback, remind yourself of the facts. Talk to yourself by saying something like:

“I’m okay. I just had a really scary flashback.
Flashbacks are normal after the incident I lived
through. I will be okay in a minute or so.”
4. Learn how to talk to others. Use your support systems. Go to a peer supporter or a friend who can listen to you. Tell them in detail about what you have experienced. Ask them if you can talk to them again when you have other Post-Traumatic Stress feelings.
5. If flashbacks interfere with your work or at home, consider seeking post-trauma counseling from a qualified, experienced professional.

SKILL BUILDING FOR SURVIVORS

Survival Rules	Post-Trauma Consequences	Skill Building Techniques
Be Alert	Hyperalertness Flashbacks Sleep Disorder	Relaxation Skills Self-Talk Skills Normalization
Be Strong	Numbing Relationship Problems Angry Outbursts	Assertion Communication Skills Cognitive Management Ventilation
Don't Think	Numbing Physical Symptoms Sleep Disorder Anniversary Responses (Severe)	Ventilation Logs/Modification Stress Management Normalization
Act OK	Relationship Problems Intrusive Thoughts	Couple Counseling Ventilation Cognitive Management
Talk About It	Reduces PTSD Feelings	Reinforce Illustrate Benefits

COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT

The loss of someone close, especially as a casualty during deployment or war, is one of life's most stressful events. It can leave you so numb that you have difficulty recognizing the reality of death or coping with its impact on your life.

Even so, you're forced to deal with ideas that cause a great deal of pain. We know, for example, that a refusal to acknowledge "the facts of death" is a disservice to the dying and the living alike, but doing so forces the acknowledgment of how real this situation is, and it hurts.

This fact sheet was not created to make the pain go away--unfortunately, nothing can do that for you except your own natural healing processes over time--but to help you understand the intense emotions you're experiencing or are going to soon feel.

BACKGROUND

Bereavement literally means "being deprived by death." It describes a process all people go through when someone close dies. Each person experiences this process differently, but there are some characteristics common to most instances of bereavement:

___ It doesn't progress in an orderly fashion.

You probably won't find yourself moving systematically from one well-defined stage to another. Instead, you'll probably drift back and forth from what might best be described as overlapping, fluid phases of anger, denial and acceptance.

___ It involves emotions and behavior that wouldn't be described as normal under other circumstances.

While some people benefit from professional help to cope with their grief, you shouldn't automatically interpret emotions or acts as a sign that you're losing your sanity.

___ It's frequently complicated.

The initial numbness makes the later physical and emotional upheaval all the more frightening, or seem a sign of weakness but it is not. Grieving is a healthy, necessary process, and refusing to grieve may postpone reactions that build up into later crises.

___ By design, bereavement is self-centered.

You need your energy to cope with your emotions. Resist the inclination to put your own needs aside in an effort to meet those of your family; a healthier idea would be to achieve a balance between your needs and theirs, and share the strain. If necessary, secure outside support and guidance from a mental health professional.

THE EXPERIENCE OF NORMAL GRIEF

Feelings- sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, shock, yearning, relief, and numbness.

Physical Sensations- hollowness in stomach, tightness in the chest, tightness in the throat, oversensitivity to noise, a sense of depersonalization, feeling short of breath, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy, dry mouth, and fatigue.

Cognitions- disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, sense of presence, hallucinations, and dreams about the deceased.

Behavior- sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, social withdrawal, absent-minded behavior, avoiding or seeking out reminders of the deceased, sighing, restlessness, crying, and visiting places or carrying objects that remind the survivor of the deceased.

PHASES

1. Numbness
2. Yearning
3. Disorganization and Despair
4. Reorganized Behavior

WHAT HELPS?

Effective coping with bereavement really depends on your ability to mourn properly. When a loved one dies, there are many things which will help you cope better with the pain. Some examples include:

— People who care.

Family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers in a mutual support group who have “been there” can all offer support. A lifetime habit of close, caring relationships is the best possible preparation for bereavement, but if you don’t have that, now is a good time to begin it.

— Understand the “facts of death.”

This is a particularly important in time of war. Knowing what to expect and knowing your options helps. Express your feelings--talk, be angry, weep. You are not alone; many grieving people need such outlets.

— Reach out for help.

Others cannot always make the first move. They may be afraid of intruding on your privacy. Make your needs known. Seeking out a mutual support group in your community is a great first step.

— Keep in touch with your physician.

Following your physician’s advice can help you deal with physical side effects.

— Accept the inevitable.

Some things in life, and certainly in war, have no basis in logic; they just happen. Accepting this can prevent much bitterness and self-blame.

— **Don't rush into major life changes.**

Moving, changing jobs, or remarrying are too important to rush. This is no time to make major decisions. Your judgement may be poor and the changes are only likely to add to your stress. Wait a year. Make big decisions then. Introduce new relationships gradually and carefully--let them grow.

If you find yourself in need of more assistance than friends and family can provide, contact your clergyperson or your physician. Your local Mental Health Association can also help you find the support you need.

HOW TO HELP THOSE YOU CARE ABOUT

1. Understand that emotional consequences can follow a traumatic experience.
2. Don't expect that the person you care about will "get better" in a certain amount of time or in a certain way. Sometimes recovery is a long and difficult process. If the person requires more time than you expected, you may feel frustrated or even angry.
3. Tell the survivor that you are sorry they have been hurt.
4. Encourage the survivor to talk to you about how they feel. When they do, listen without interrupting or making judgments about what you hear. All survivors' feelings are ok even if you might not feel the same way.
5. Remind the survivor that their confusing emotions are **normal** in a terrible occurrence.
6. **Do not** attempt to impose your explanation on why this has happened to the survivor. It probably won't be the explanation the survivor believes and imposing your view might hurt your relationship with them.
7. **Do not** tell the survivor, "I know how you feel" or "Everything will be all right." Often, these statements are really efforts to relieve your own anxiety about how you feel about what has happened to the survivor. Survivors say that when they hear these statements they think that people do not care about or understand them.
8. An important way to provide support to the survivor is to go with them to any court hearings, community meetings or other appointments that relate to the trauma.
9. Be willing to say nothing. Just being there is often all that you can do to help.
10. Don't be afraid to encourage a survivor to ask for help in the form of post-trauma counseling. You might accompany them to the first appointment to show your support and concern.