

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO TRAUMATIC STRESS



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4 PHASES OF CRISIS PLANNING

1. Prevention/Mitigation
2. Preparedness
3. Response
4. Recovery

DEFINITION OF TRAUMATIC STRESS

- ◎ Response to an event that affects ones sense of security making you feel helpless and vulnerable.

(Your nervous system stuck in overdrive!)

- [Help Guide.org](http://HelpGuide.org)

4 ELEMENTS

1. Event was unexpected
2. Person was unprepared for the event
3. Nothing could be done to prevent incident
4. Or event happened repeatedly

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF TRAUMA

- ◉ Disaster
- ◉ Physical assault
- ◉ Serious bodily harm
- ◉ Surgery
- ◉ Illness
- ◉ Learning of violent event
- ◉ Divorce
- ◉ Job loss
- ◉ Serious injury/illness/death of loved one

SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA

- ◉ Eating disorder
- ◉ Sleeping disorder
- ◉ Sexual dysfunction
- ◉ Low energy
- ◉ Chronic pain
- ◉ Withdrawal
- ◉ Increased heart rate
- ◉ Could last days, weeks, months

WHY ARE SOME AFFECTED AND OTHERS NOT?

- ◉ No clear answer but consider:
- ◉ Life's experience
- ◉ What the event means to victim
- ◉ Individual coping skills
- ◉ Reaction and support of family/friends
- ◉ Response to professional help

WE CANNOT PREDICT HOW A PERSON WILL REACT.

- ◎ It is not the event that determines whether something is traumatic, but the individual's experience of the event.
- ◎ The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized.
- ◎ Even experienced professionals react differently in different settings.

COLUMBINE, AND THE AFTERMATH

- ◎ Suicide of students
- ◎ Rates of suicide per capita in Colorado:
 - Top 5 since 2000

RISK FACTORS

- ⦿ Already under stress
- ⦿ Recently suffered a significant event
- ⦿ Have been traumatized previously

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

- ⦿ Not functioning well at home or at work
- ⦿ Suffering from fear, anxiety, or depression
- ⦿ Experiencing nightmares or flashbacks
- ⦿ Avoiding activities, people, places that remind you of event
- ⦿ Withdrawal from friends and families
- ⦿ Drug or alcohol abuse
- ⦿ **OVER A PERIOD OF TIME!**

SELF-HELP STRATEGIES

- ◎ Don't isolate
- ◎ Ask for support - talk about your feelings to trusted family member or friend
- ◎ Establish a routine, i.e. sleep hours, meal times, etc.
- ◎ Take care of health, i.e. rest, balanced diet, exercise, laugh
- ◎ Avoid drugs and excessive alcohol

FBI STUDY: POLICE RELATED TRAUMA

- ◎ 1/3 will suffer zero or short-term effects
- ◎ 1/3 will suffer mid-term effects
- ◎ 1/3 will suffer long-term effects

- ◎ The problem is you may not know where you fit until the damage is done. Seek help after any significant event or when your life has been affected by lesser or repeated incidents, if your life does return to normal again in a reasonable amount of time.

STRESS THE SILENT KILLER



