

Coping with a personal crisis



British Red Cross

UK Office
44 Moorfields
London
EC2Y 9AL

Tel 0870 170 7000
Fax 020 7562 2000
redcross.org.uk

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Coping with a crisis

Your experience was a very personal one, but this pamphlet will help you to understand how others have reacted in similar situations. It will also show how you can come to terms with recent events and avoid potential pitfalls.

Normal feelings and emotions you may experience

Fear

- > of damage to yourself and those you love
- > of being left alone or having to leave loved ones
- > of 'breaking down' or 'losing control'
- > of a similar event happening again.

Helplessness

- > because crises show up human weaknesses, as well as strengths.

Sadness

- > for deaths, injuries and losses of every kind.

Longing

- > for all that has gone.

Guilt

- > for being better off than others (e.g. for surviving, not being injured on still having material things)
- > regrets for things not done.

Shame

- > for having been exposed as helpless, emotional and in need of others
- > for not having reacted as you would have wished.

Anger

- > at what has happened and at whoever caused it or allowed it to happen
- > at the injustice and senselessness of it all
- > at the shame and indignities
- > at the lack of proper understanding from others and their perceived inefficiencies
- > why me?

Memories

- > of loss or love for other people in your life who have been injured or died at other times.

Disappointment

- > for all the plans that will now never be fulfilled.

Hope

- > for the future and better times.

It is natural to have all these feelings, though they may vary in intensity according to your circumstances. Acceptance of the situation and loss will only be made possible by allowing these feelings to come out. This will not lead to loss of control, but stopping such feelings may lead to other and possibly more complicated problems.

Remember, crying can give relief.

Physical and mental sensations

Some common sensations are tiredness, sleeplessness, bad dreams, fuzziness of the mind (including loss of memory and concentration), dizziness, palpitations, trembling, difficulty in breathing, choking in the throat and chest, nausea, diarrhoea, change in sexual interest and muscular tension which may lead to pain (e.g. headaches, neck and back aches, abdominal pain/tummy ache, menstrual disorders).

Numbness

Your mind may allow the misfortune to be felt only slowly. At first, you may feel numb. The event may seem unreal, like a dream or something that has not really happened. Other people often see this wrongly as you either 'being strong' or 'uncaring'.

Activity

Helping others may give you some relief.

Reality

Facing the reality, by attending funerals, inspecting losses or returning to the scene, can help you to come to terms with the crisis. At this stage, there is a need to think about it, talk about it and at night to dream about it, over and over again. Children will react by playing out and drawing the event.

Support

It can be a relief to receive other people's physical and emotional support. Sharing your thoughts with others who have had similar experiences can also help.

Privacy

In order to deal with feelings, you may find it necessary to be alone or just with family and close friends.

Some dos and don'ts

DO take time out to sleep, rest, think and be with those important to you.

DO try to keep your life as normal as possible.

DO let children talk about their emotions and express themselves in games and drawings.

DO send your children back to school and let them keep up with their activities.

DO drive more carefully.

DO be more careful around the home.

DO express your emotions and let children share in the grief.

DO take every opportunity to review the experience.

DO allow yourself to be part of a group of people who care.

DON'T bottle up feelings.

DON'T avoid talking about what happened.

DON'T expect the memories to go away – the feelings will stay with you for a long time to come.

DON'T be critical of your reactions.

Family and social relationships

New friendships and relationships may develop. On the other hand, strains and conflict may appear in existing relationships. You may feel that family and friends offer too little support or the wrong kind, or that you cannot give as much in return as they expect. Accidents are more frequent after severe stress. Alcohol and drug intake may also increase, due to the extra tension.

When to seek help

- > If you feel that your emotions are not falling into place and you are still experiencing tension, confusion, emptiness or exhaustion.
- > If, after a month, you continue to feel numb or you have to keep active in order not to think about it.
- > If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
- > If you want to share your feelings and have no-one with whom to do so.
- > If your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.
- > If you have accidents.
- > If you continue to smoke, drink or take drugs to excess, after the event.
- > If your work performance suffers.

DO remember that you are basically the same person that you were before the crisis.

DO remember that if you suffer too much or too long, help is available.

Where to find help

Your GP

The social services department of your local council

Your local British Red Cross office
www.redcross.org.uk

CRUSE Bereavement 0870 167 1677
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Salvation Army 0845 634 0101
www.salvationarmy.org.uk

Samaritans 0845 790 9090
www.samaritans.org.uk

This leaflet has been produced to help people affected by disaster or a personal crisis.