

How to Cope after a Potentially Traumatic Event

We all react to stressful or potentially traumatic incidents in different ways, experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to think, feel, or respond, so try not to judge your own reactions or those of other people. **Your responses are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events.** Some common reactions after a traumatic incident could include:

Common Trauma Reactions:

- Feeling fearful, worried or anxious
- May feel more unsafe
- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Feeling angry, irritated or having mood swings
- Spending more time alone, not going out as much or seeing friends or family
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Inability to sleep or feeling really tired
- Constantly replaying the event in your mind
- Racing heartbeat or sweaty hands
- Startled easily by loud noises
- Aches and pains
- Muscle tension

How to Support Others That May Be Impacted

Be patient and understanding. Healing from traumatic event takes time. Be patient with the pace of recovery and remember that everyone's response to trauma is different. Don't judge your loved one's reaction against your own response or anyone else's.

Offer practical support to help your loved one get back into a normal routine. That may mean helping with collecting groceries or doing housework, for example, or simply being available to talk or listen.

Don't pressure your loved one into talking but be available if they want to talk. Some trauma survivors find it difficult to talk about what they experienced. Don't force your loved one to open up but let them know you are there to listen if they want to talk, or available to just hang out if they don't.

Don't take the trauma symptoms personally. Your loved one may become angry, irritable, withdrawn, or emotionally distant. Remember that this is a result of the trauma and may not have anything to do with you or your relationship.

Communicate openly. To help a child or loved one recover from trauma, it's important to communicate openly. Let them know that it's normal to feel scared or upset. Your child may also look to you for cues on how they should respond to trauma, so let them see you dealing with your symptoms in a positive way.

Where to Go for More Support in My Community?

The City of Toronto has partnered with over 25+ organizations to help connect residents to free telephone, text and online mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic. To learn more visit <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-mental-health-resources/>.

To access this service, call 211 Central. This is a central access point to be connected to the appropriate mental health and other social services that meet your needs. Available 24/7.

- Call: 211
- TTY: 1-888-340-1001
- Text: 21166

HELPFUL TIPS:

Get Moving!

Traumatic events disrupt your body's natural rhythm, freezing you in a state of anxiety and fear. Exercise and movement can actually help repair your nervous system as well as burn off adrenaline and release endorphins – the feel good chemicals! Go for a walk, run or to the gym!


Don't Isolate!

Following a traumatic event, you may want to withdraw from others, but isolating yourself may make things worse. Connecting with others face to face will help you heal, so make an effort to maintain your relationships and avoid spending too much time alone. Connect with family & friends, participate in social activities, and ask for support if you need it!


Help to Calm Your Body Down!

No matter how agitated, anxious, or out of control you may feel, it's important to know that you can change how you feel and calm yourself down. Not only will it help relieve the anxiety associated with trauma, but it will also provide you with a greater sense of control. This can include mindful breathing, sensory input (music, smells, etc.) and allowing yourself to feel what you feel when you feel it.

Healing from potentially traumatic incidents is a process, takes time, and everyone heals at their own pace.

SQUARE BREATHING EXERCISE

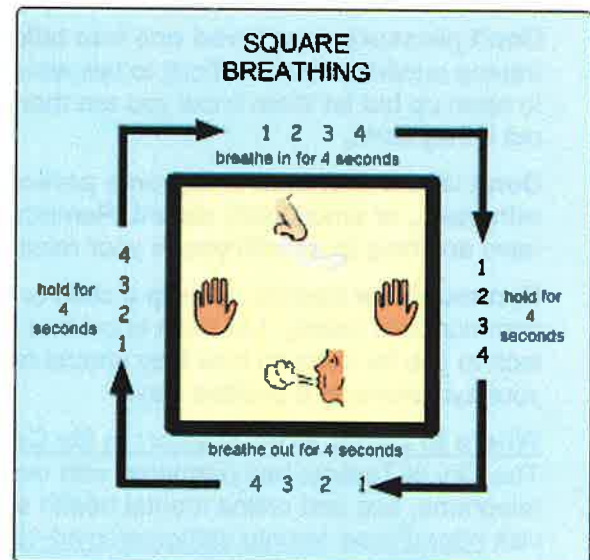
This breathing technique is a way of breathing slowly and deeply which helps to reduce stress and induce feelings of calmness. To begin, make sure you are seated upright, with your feet on the floor, and you may close your eyes or gaze at the floor. Throughout the exercise you will focus on filling your lungs with oxygen and blowing out all your worries and stress.

Step 1: Slowly inhale through your nose for a count of four seconds

Step 2: Hold your breath for a count of four seconds

Step 3: Slowly breathe out through your mouth for a count of 4 seconds

Step 4: Hold your breath for a count of four seconds


More Calming Strategies When You Feel Anxious

- Colour or draw
- Use a weighted blanket
- Listen to calming music
- Write your thoughts down in a journal
- Use some essential oil
- Take a nice bath or a shower
- Chew gum
- Practice meditation
- Speak to a counsellor or therapist
- Run cold water on your wrists