

You have been through a traumatic experience. You have lost someone close to you, been in an accident, hurt yourself, or been subjected to violence. You have witnessed a traumatic event or been in a dangerous situation. Someone you care for has committed or attempted suicide.

After experiencing a traumatic event, it is completely healthy and normal to have a reaction. Sometimes just thinking about what might have happened may also cause strong emotions.

#### REACTIONS DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS

- Everything feels unreal, nightmarish.
- You have difficulty understanding and accepting what has happened.
- You may have a headache, feel nauseous, feel cold, sweat or have muscle tension.
- You have become numb or your feelings suddenly burst out, for example in bouts of tearfulness. You may experience feelings of guilt, anger, fear, sadness or relief.
- You find it hard to fall asleep or you sleep restlessly.
- You have recurring flashbacks of the event.
- You may experience sensations of smells and sounds and see distressing images of the event.
- You are afraid that the same thing will happen again, think that you are going mad or are frightened that you will be on your own.
- You feel like you need to understand what has happened and find a reason or someone to blame.

#### FEELINGS DURING THE FIRST WEEKS

- You re-experience the event intensively over and over.
- You feel anxious and unsettled.
- You feel irritable, are easily angered with a very short fuse and have outbursts of anger triggered by the smallest things.
- You are distressed, depressed or listless.
- Your feelings are contradictory: you feel relieved that you were able to survive but feel guilty that you were luckier than others.
- You get upset easily and may misinterpret other people.
- You have problems remembering and concentrating.

► People's reactions to the same event differ, and some react stronger than others.

► Normal reactions to unusual events decrease over time. They may, however, reoccur even after a long period of time. Your reactions help you to understand the experience you have been through. Gradually you will get over the traumatic event and can go on with your life.

#### WAYS TO HELP YOURSELF COPE

- Talk about what happened to you with other people. Tell them how you felt and what you were thinking both during the traumatic event and afterwards. Talking about the experience helps you come to terms with it.
- Go back to where it all happened – if at all possible – with someone you trust, for example.
- Meet other people in your situation.
- Stick to routines at work if you find it difficult to concentrate on demanding tasks. Talk about your traumatic experience with your superior and colleagues to help them understand your situation.
- Relieve stress by exercising. Go for a walk, for example.
- Avoid excessive amounts of alcohol and sedatives.
- Listen to your close friends and family to see how they feel. They have been affected too.
- Remember that your reactions are normal and part of the process. Do not keep scary or strange feelings inside but let them out.
- Crying helps.
- Sometimes it is easier to express your feelings through action instead of talking. Draw, paint, write, play or exercise.

## CHILDREN NEED SUPPORT

- Children react to traumatic events the same way as adults.
- Talk to children about what has happened.
- Encourage them to express their feelings by playing or drawing, for example.
- Do not hide your own feelings too much.
- Give children time to understand.
- Enhance their sense of security by keeping to normal routines.

## WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- You are constantly anxious, depressed or stressed.
- You find it difficult to fall asleep or your sleep is restless.
- You cannot concentrate.
- You cannot cope at work.
- You have unexplained physical symptoms.
- You have no one to talk to.
- Your relationships suffer and you detach yourself.
- You have lost your will to live.
- You are using too much drugs or alcohol.
- You feel suicidal.

▶ Seek help if you have any of these symptoms

## WHERE TO FIND HELP

Health care centres and hospitals, various crisis groups and centres, occupational health care services, social service centres, mental health care centres, family counselling clinics, churches and many organisations all provide help.

## NATIONWIDE HELP LINES

- The nationwide crisis help line of the Finnish Association for Mental Health: 010 195 202
- The help line of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: 0400 221 180
- The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare's counselling line for children and young people: 116 111
- Victim Support Finland: 116 006

▶ You can also ask for help through the general emergency number 112.

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HELP IS PROVIDED IN THIS AREA BY

Punainen Risti 

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experience