

Trauma

"I can't get over it!"

If you have experienced a **shocking event** or **trauma**, in which you were hurt, or you were scared you would be hurt, or you witnessed someone being injured or killed, you might find that you experience some emotional and physical changes.

In this leaflet, we will look at how trauma affects people, what people can do about it, and when to seek professional help.

What is trauma?

Emotional and psychological trauma can be caused by single-blow, one-time events, such as a violent attack, a horrible accident or a natural disaster. Trauma can also stem from ongoing, continuous stress, such as living in a crime-ridden neighbourhood or experiencing ongoing physical or sexual abuse.

Some examples of traumatic events are:

Hijacking
Rape
Car accidents
Witnessing a murder
Any serious accident
Armed Robbery
Assault
Gang violence

Whatever the type of event, traumatic events normally have the following in common:

- It was unexpected
- The person was unprepared
- The person felt helpless during the event

Responses to trauma

Whether an event is perceived as traumatic or not is quite personal. Not everybody responds to events in the same way. However, trauma can have both emotional and physical effects:

Emotional effects of trauma:

- Shock, denial or disbelief
- Fearful, especially when reminded of the event
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Anger, irritability, mood swings

Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Unable to sleep
- Aches and pains
- Nightmares
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat

Remember, these are all *normal* responses to an *abnormal* situation. Normally, the effects of the trauma last from a few days to a few months, gradually fading.

How to cope with trauma

It is important to look after yourself when you have been through a trauma. Some things which might help are:

- Understand that you might not feel like yourself for a while
- Realise that the bad feelings will pass
- Keep busy
- Cry if you want to
- Try not to use drugs or alcohol to feel calm – in the long run this can make the problem worse
- Take care of yourself – do things which relax you – a bath, a funny movie, a nice meal, hairdresser
- Exercise – daily if possible – this really helps
- Talk to a friend, family member or counsellor

When to seek help

You can speak to a counsellor at any time, but if some of the following symptoms are present, then speaking to a professional is recommended:

- Your studies are suffering
- You are having trouble coping with your day-to-day activities
- You are experiencing severe fear or depression
- You have isolated yourself from other people
- You experience terrifying memories, nightmares, or flashbacks
- You are alcohol or drugs to calm yourself down

Find us @:

Student Wellness Services

28 Rhodes Avenue

Mowbray

Telephone Numbers:

- **021 650 1017**
- **021 650 1020**

Hours:

Mon – Fri 08H30 – 16H30

be informed

know the dangers

make an informed choice!!