

## Witnessing a Traumatic Event

After witnessing a traumatic event, you can expect to experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. In some cases, you might suffer both emotional and physical reactions.

- Stress reactions can occur at any point ranging from immediately after the event, a few hours after the event or even a few days or a few months after the event.
- There is no hard and fast rule regarding stress reaction. The symptoms might last a few days, weeks or months depending on the severity of the traumatic event and your ability to cope.
- It is important to remember that you have just witnessed a major traumatic event and it is completely normal not to feel yourself. There are various physical, mental, emotional and behavioral symptoms that may occur as a result of the trauma.
- With the understanding and support of loved ones, stress reactions usually pass quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so overwhelming that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary.

### What Can I Do to Lessen the Stress?

- Structure your time – keep busy.
- Don't label yourself as being crazy – you are normal and having a normal reaction.
- Talk to people – talk is healing.
- Don't try to numb the pain by overusing drugs or alcohol.
- Reach out – people do care.
- Try to maintain a normal schedule.
- Spend time with others.
- Sharing your feelings with others that have suffered the same trauma can be helpful.
- Keep a journal – write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do something nice for yourself.
- Realize that those around you are also under stress.
- Don't make any big lifestyle changes.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life. This can be as simple as deciding what you would like to eat.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks. They are normal and will decrease over time and eventually become less painful.
- Eat regular, well-balanced meals (even if you don't feel like it).

### For Family Members and Friends:

- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Listen carefully.
- Offer your assistance – even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Assist them with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, caring for the family or minding the children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't make statements such as “It could have been worse”.
- Remember that your loved one has just suffered a very painful event. Tell them you love them; you are sorry that this happened; and you want to understand and help them any way you can.