

## Have you experienced an overwhelming or frightening event? Someone you know may also have been affected.

When a person experiences a crisis, it is normal to feel a range of different emotions including grief, sadness, anxiety, fear, anger or stress. These feelings may occur shortly following the event or they may not occur for some time afterwards. They may last a very short period of time or can last months or even years. In some people, the more serious psychological reaction – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may develop.

Read this pamphlet and learn how to get help. It is a useful guide to help affected persons to cope with physical or emotional stress.

## You can feel better and get your life back!

Each person responds to a crisis differently. It is important though, to understand the different reactions that accompany the incident and to know how to care for yourself during times of extreme stress.

The information below has been created to assist you during times of stress and crisis.



### WHERE TO GET HELP

Talk to your family doctor or a mental health specialist, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker about the terrible event and your feelings.

This is called “therapy”. Therapy can help you work through your terrible experience. A doctor may give you medicine to help lessen your tension and anxieties.

You can approach **your family doctor** or any of the following:

#### INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

10 Buangkok View, Singapore 539747  
Tel: 6389 2200 (Appointment Line)

#### ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL

378 Alexandra Road, Singapore 159964  
Tel: 6472 2000 (Appointment Line)

#### CHANGI GENERAL HOSPITAL

2 Simei Street 3, Singapore 529889  
Tel: 6850 3333 (Appointment Line)

#### KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL

90 Yishun Central, Singapore 768828  
Tel: 6555 8828 (Appointment Line)

#### KK WOMEN'S & CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

100 Bukit Timah Road, Singapore 229899  
Tel: 6294 4050 (Appointment Line)

#### NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074  
Neuroscience Clinic, Level 4, Kent Ridge Wing  
Tel: 6772 2002 (Appointment Line)

#### NG TENG FONG GENERAL HOSPITAL

1 Jurong East Street 21, Singapore 609606  
Tel: 6716 2222 (Appointment Line)

#### SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL

Outram Road, Singapore 169608  
Tel: 6321 4377 (Appointment Line)

#### TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL

11 Jalan Tan Tock Seng, Singapore 308433  
Tel: 6357 7000 (Appointment Line)

#### SENGKANG GENERAL HOSPITAL

110 Sengkang East Way, Singapore 544886  
Tel: 6930 6000 (Appointment Line)

Have you experienced  
an overwhelming or  
frightening event?

**WE CARE**  
You can feel better



## Typical Reactions to Crisis

### COGNITIVE

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Poor concentration
- Nightmares
- Confusion
- “Flashbacks” or crisis
- Self-doubt

### PHYSICAL

- Tiredness or loss of energy
- Body aches and pain
- Breathing difficulties
- Rapid heart beat
- Choking in the throat/chest
- Sweating or chills
- Dizziness
- Muscular tension
- Trembling
- Distress, nausea, vomiting
- Headaches and/or back pain
- Change in sexual interest
- Menstrual disturbance

### BEHAVIOURAL

- Changes in activity level
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Restlessness, agitation or pacing
- Eating or appetite changes
- Sleep disturbance/insomnia
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Inability to relax

### EMOTIONAL

- Shock or denial
- Sadness/grief
  - for deaths and losses experienced
  - which leads to sudden crying which takes you or others by surprise
- Anger or irritability
  - at what has happened, at whoever has 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 by others, and of their inefficiencies
- Feeling of hopelessness
- Depression
- Fear and anxiety
  - of breaking down or losing control
  - of similar event happening again
  - of being left alone
  - of sudden noise
- Avoidance
  - of thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the crisis
  - of activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the crisis
- Shame
  - for having been exposed as helpless and emotionally dependent
  - for not having done as one would have wished
- Mood changes
- Numbness
  - everything seems unreal, like a dream and that the event has not really happened
- Guilt
  - for surviving, for being alive, for still having material things
  - for things not said or done
- Disappointment
  - for all the plans that are now spoilt
- Intrusive memories
  - of the crisis which are repeated, intrusive and distressing

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

- Return to earlier behaviour, such as thumb sucking or bed wetting
- Clinging to parents
- Reluctance to go to bed
- Nightmares
- Crying or screaming
- Refusal to attend school
- Problems at school and inability to concentrate
- Withdrawal and immobility
- Loss of appetite

## Tips for Coping and Self Care

### **Remember, you are not alone.**

Help yourself and those around you in some simple ways:

### **DO**

- Recognise and accept your feelings as normal responses to extreme circumstances.
- Reach out and make contact with others.
- Express your emotions
  - talk with friends and loved ones or keep a diary to help in the process.
- Allow yourself to mourn. You have the right to grieve this loss. Remember, crying can give relief.
- Express your emotions appropriately.
- Keep life as normal as possible after the acute grief
  - get back to your daily routine
- Get extra rest and set aside time to relax.
- Breathe slowly, deeply, and well. Relaxation begins with slow, deep breathing from your diaphragm.
- Eat regular balanced meals even if you don't feel hungry.
- Get active. Exercise or participate in some regular physical activity.
- Be more careful around the home and on the road.
- Allow children to share in your grief.
- Let children talk about their emotions and express themselves through games and drawings.

### **DON'T**

- Bottle up your feelings.
- Avoid talking about what has happened or what you are going through.
- Make major decisions or changes in your life.
- Depend on alcohol or drugs.
- Expect the memories to go away – they may stay with you for a long time to come.
- Forget that children experience similar feelings.

## When to Get Help

PTSD develops in some people after they experience a traumatic event. Symptoms include vivid memories, anxiety and withdrawing from people and situations.

These symptoms/reactions disappear in most people over time. However, in rare cases, symptoms may appear for several months or even years after the trauma.

Some people with PTSD recover by themselves but others need professional help. It is normal for some of us to need professional help from others. You should seek professional help if you:

- Remain highly anxious, tense, confused, empty and exhausted after 4-6 weeks.
- Continue to feel numb even after a month.
- Have trouble expressing your feelings or relating to other people.
- Continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
- Have no one to share your feelings with and feel the need to do so.
- Develop depression or have thoughts of self-harm.
- Suffer badly in your relationships or begin to develop sexual problems.
- Start being accident-prone.
- Begin to smoke or drink excessively or turn to drugs or other forms of relief.
- Continue to perform badly in your work.
- Worry that those around you are particularly vulnerable or not recovering satisfactorily.
- Experience chronic exhaustion as a helper.

