

Tips on managing psychological trauma

There are several things you can do to look after yourself and promote recovery from a traumatic event or situation. The following points provide some general advice.

Recognize that you have been through a distressing experience and give yourself permission to experience some reaction to it. Don't be angry with yourself for being upset.

Remind yourself that you are not abnormal and that you can and are coping.

Avoid overuse of alcohol or other drugs to cope.

Avoid making any major decisions or big life changes.

Do not try to block out thoughts of what has happened.

Gradually confronting what has happened will assist in coming to terms with the traumatic experience.

Don't 'bottle up' your feelings - share your experiences with others when opportunities arise. This may feel uncomfortable at times, but talking to understanding people that you trust is helpful in dealing with trauma.

Try to maintain a normal routine. Keep busy and structure your day.

Make sure you do not unnecessarily avoid certain activities or places.

Allow yourself time to rest if you are feeling tired, and remember that regular exercise is important.

Let your friends and family know of your needs. Help them to help you by letting them know when you are tired, need time out, or need a chance to talk or just be with someone.

Make time to practice relaxation. You can use a formal technique such as progressive muscle relaxation, or just make time to absorb yourself in a relaxing activity such as gardening or listening to music. This will help your body and nervous system to settle and readjust.

If the trauma that you experience stirs up other memories or feelings from a past unrelated stressful occurrence, or even childhood experiences, try not to let the memories all blur together. Keep the memories separate and deal with them separately.

Express your feelings as they arise. Whether you discuss them with someone else or write them down in a diary, expressing feelings in some way often helps the healing process.

When to seek professional assistance

You should seek professional assistance if the symptoms resulting from the trauma are too distressing or last for more than a couple of weeks. Warning signs may include:

- Being unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations

- Feeling numb and empty

- Continuing to experience strong distressing emotions

- Continuing to have physical symptoms of being tense, agitated, and on edge

- Continuing to have disturbed sleep and/ or nightmares

- Having no-one to support you and with whom you can share your feelings and emotions

- Having relationship problems with friends, family and colleagues

- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs.

https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/trauma/#s3