

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Coping with Trauma

For people having suffered a trauma—from a violent incident or natural disaster, to the loss of a loved one or a terminal diagnosis; life has irrevocably changed. A traumatic event can cause strong emotional reactions that interfere with your ability to carry out day-to-day activities. You might find you have trouble concentrating, remembering things, or even trusting people. It's important to address the effects of trauma before they become more devastating than the traumatic event itself.

Steps To Help Overcome Trauma

While overcoming a traumatic event and getting on with your life is never easy, the suggestions below can help you cope with trauma and restore physical and emotional balance to your life.

Mobilize a support system. Connect with others, especially those who may have experienced a similar traumatic experience. Talking about your fears, concerns and feelings is an important step in the healing process. Verbalizing your thoughts will help you understand your emotions and identify which ones need immediate attention.

Take care of your body. Eat regular, nutritious meals, get a good night's sleep, and exercise regularly to help keep your body and mind in good shape. Studies show that physical activity, like jogging, walking or bicycling, releases mood-enhancing endorphins that can help lift your spirits, as well as your heart rate. Eating healthy food, especially fruits and vegetables, can also boost your mood, but avoid over-use of nicotine, caffeine and sugar. While they may seem tempting when you're feeling stressed, these stimulants can leave you feeling on edge and actually interfere with your ability to cope.

Maintain a normal schedule. Return to regular activities like exercise, work and social events as quickly as possible to re-establish a routine and sense of order in your life. Avoid making big life changes such as moving, as this will only add to your stress levels.

Do things you enjoy. Engage in fun, creative activities like gardening, cooking, painting, music or photography. Pursue your interests and take pleasure in the little things as a way of restoring joy in your life.

Get help. Get support from a qualified professional who can provide the direction you need to help you through this difficult time.

Other helpful coping strategies:

- **Pray or meditate.** Seeking spiritual inspiration may help you find answers to some of your deeper questions surrounding the trauma and find meaning in your experience.
- **Keep a journal.** Recording your thoughts and feelings encourages the healing process.
- **Relax.** Take a warm, soothing bath, listen to music, or go for a walk in the park to clear your mind and lift your mood.
- **Spend quality time with people you love.** Share a meal with family or friends; play with your children, grandchildren, nieces/nephews. Social interaction can infuse energy and fresh perspectives into your life.
- **Laugh.** Even in the middle of the most stressful situations, humor can lighten your mood and help you stay positive.

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By recognizing the signs and following the coping strategies above, you can take steps to reduce the effects of trauma and get on with your life. You may find that overcoming a trauma can help you discover a greater compassion for others, a sense of peace and a renewed inner strength.