

# Coping with the aftermath of a Major Incident



If you or people in your community have been involved in a major incident or event, you may find this leaflet helpful. It explores how you might feel in the days and months after the incident and has information about how you can get help, if you need it.

## After an incident or event

Often, major events can make us feel life is unfair and unsafe. But despite our feelings and problems at the time, it is clear that looking back afterwards, most people do cope well and recover without long-term problems.

Everyone is different and each person has his or her own feelings afterwards.

What you have seen and heard is likely to have an effect on you, even if you have not been injured or directly affected. Coping can be difficult. What has happened can cause strong feelings, but, usually, these settle in a short while.

## How you might be affected

Major events are shocking and some of them can feel overwhelming. After any major event, it is normal to have feelings such as anxiety and shock. These experiences may continue for some weeks.

People who are directly involved and those who lose loved ones, are the people who are likely to be most affected. However, witnesses, friends and relatives may have reactions too.

## In the following few weeks, you might experience:

- tears and sadness
- fear
- anxiety
- numbness or dreaminess
- unpleasant memories about the event
- problems with your concentration
- difficulties with your memory
- difficulties with sleeping and nightmares
- feeling less confident or, sometimes, helpless
- reduced energy
- feeling angry or irritable
- reduced appetite
- guilt about the incident
- headaches and other aches and pains
- feelings of reluctance to discuss the event or alternatively wanting to talk about it all the time
- sleep problems and tiredness
- wanting to avoid people, places or activities that remind you of the event
- elation about surviving.

## Immediately afterwards, you might feel:

- stunned, dazed or numb
- cut off from what is going on around you
- unable to accept what has happened
- that it hasn't really happened.

**Usually, these feelings fade and others may take their place in the hours or days afterwards.**

Children and young people are as likely to be as affected as adults and may have similar experiences. Often, they become unsettled and more aggressive or fearful and it is usual for them to become more clingy and demanding. Also, they may 're-play' the event in their games. These reactions are understandable and, usually, reduce gradually over time. Like adults, children cope surprisingly well in the longer-term.

## What can I do that's helpful?

You should:

- take each day at a time
- do things that make you feel safe and secure
- be patient with yourself; it may take weeks or months to feel that you and your life are back to normal
- try to re-establish your usual routines such as going to work or school
- spend time with family, friends, and others who may be able to help you through this difficult time
- give reassurance to children to help them to feel safe and to talk about their fears and worries
- take good care of yourself physically; eat well, exercise regularly, reduce alcohol and recreational drug use and get enough sleep
- talk it over when you are ready, but, don't worry if you get upset or cry while you think or talk about what happened
- take extra care; after a major incident or event, people are more likely to have accidents

## Do I need professional help?

Most people who have experienced a major incident find they get better over time. However, if you are still having difficulties after a month, you might need some help from professional sources.

The same advice applies to your children; they, too, may benefit from help if their feelings and

behaviour are a worry to you a month after the event. It is helpful to seek advice if this is the case. Going to school and also pursuing leisure and recreational interests, may be very helpful to children and young people because it re-establishes a routine and brings them into contact with friends.

## Where do I find help?

Speak to your family doctor (you could take this leaflet along) or contact NHS Direct on **0845 4647** (24 hours), [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Other support groups and caring organisations you may find helpful include:

**The Samaritans** – Offers a 24-hour helpline for those in crisis. Gloucester and District Branch Tel: **01452 306333**. Tel: **08457 909090**  
[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

**Cruse** – Bereavement Care – Offers counselling, advice and support throughout the UK. Gloucestershire Branch Tel: **01242 252 518**.  
Tel: **0870 167 1677** (Monday - Friday 9.30am - 5pm)  
[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

**Disaster Action** – Provides support and guidance to those people who are affected by disasters. Tel: **01483 799 066** [www.disasteraction.org.uk](http://www.disasteraction.org.uk)

**Assist Trauma Care** – Offers telephone counselling and support to individuals and families in the aftermath of trauma.  
Tel: **01788 560800** (Helpline).

## What isn't helpful?

- Bottling up your feelings – let yourself talk when you feel ready
- Alcohol and recreational drugs – while they can numb your feelings, they can also stop you from coming to terms with what has happened or cause more problems later.

## What professional help can I expect?

Advice, help, and treatment can help people of all ages to come to terms with an event, by talking about their feelings and learning to cope better.

Your GP might suggest that you talk with someone who specialises in helping people cope with traumas. This might involve a 'talking treatment', such as counselling or psychotherapy. Sometimes, medication is helpful. Your GP will be able to guide you to the most appropriate resources.

For useful information on coping with trauma, see the following websites:

[www.istss.org](http://www.istss.org)  
[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info/index.htm](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info/index.htm)  
[www.uktrauma.org.uk](http://www.uktrauma.org.uk)  
[webmaster@uktrauma.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@uktrauma.org.uk)

If you feel comfortable talking to your local faith leader they may also be able to help.

For help with dealing with practical social care issues due to the current situation contact Gloucestershire County Council's Social Care Emergency helpline on 0800 954 8966 from 8.30am-5.00pm weekdays.

This leaflet has been produced by Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust and Gloucestershire County Council, working with their partner agencies.

For a copy of this leaflet in English please call 01452 396928.

তমোনে জো আ দস্তাবেজনি গুজরাতি নকল জোঁঠতি হোয় তো, মডেৱআনি করীনে টেপিষ্ট্রিনে ৩৬৬০৬ নংপর পর ফোন করশো.

আপনি যদি এই কাগজটির একটা বাংলা কপি চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ৩৯৬৯০৯ নম্বরে ট্যাপেস্ট্রীকে টেলিফোন করবেন।

如果你需要這份文件的中文譯本，請致電達意處 396926。

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کی نقل اردو زبان میں درکار ہے تو براہ مہربانی جیسوسی کو 396928 پر فون کریں۔

Jeśli potrzebujesz kopii owej ulotki w języku polskim, proszę zadzwoń pod podany numer Tapestry: tel (01452) 396909.