

Lancashire Traumatic Stress Service

Coping with Traumatic Events

Sadly, many people in their lives are exposed to events which they find to be very traumatic. These events, will for everyone, have an effect on how we think, how we feel and what we do. They can also have an effect on our relationships, on our social life and on our work.

Many people will, after a time, and often with the support of family and friends, find their way through these traumatic experiences. The events will never be forgotten but they will be events that become part of our history as we adapt and cope.

For others, though, traumatic events are particularly hard to handle and some people get “stuck” replaying the event over and over again. This can be distressing, difficult to handle and have a serious effect on our lives.

Following exposure to a traumatic event or events, some people may, after a period of time be diagnosed as suffering from PTSD. If you want to find out more about the diagnosis of PTSD, please visit our website www.lancashiretraumaticstressservice.nhs.uk

In January 2008, the Department of Health published some good guidance on how to cope with a traumatic incident. The information below is taken from this guidance.

Immediately after a traumatic event it will be usual to 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

In the following few weeks, you might experience

- fear
- anxiety
- unpleasant memories about the event
- problems with your concentration
- difficulties with your memory
- difficulties with sleeping, nightmares and tiredness
- 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 you wish to talk about it all the time

- wanting to avoid people, places or activities that remind you of the event (and this might include traveling on public transport)
- elation about surviving

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

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