



What can I do to help myself cope better with traumatic events?

There are many ways that people can help themselves cope with traumatic experiences. Research has demonstrated that the use of these strategies enhances well-being. Following is a list of “Dos” and “don’ts” after a traumatic event that have been shown to protect mental health and enhance the natural human tendency to be resilient.

What things should I focus on doing right now?

1. Do keep to your normal routine and rituals as much as possible. Doing so will help you create a sense of normalcy, predictability, and controllability, and will make you feel more secure and safe.
2. Do turn to your family and friends for support. Research finds that getting support from your family, friends and members of your community can help protect you from the negative effects of trauma.
3. Do handle day-to-day conflict appropriately to minimize negative encounters caused by the strain, fatigue, and irritability that often follow trauma. For example, if you have an argument with someone, take the time to resolve it so that it doesn't add to the stress you are already facing.
4. Do find ways to relax and get enough sleep and rest. Some people find it helps to exercise, take yoga, pray, meditate, or using breathing or progressive muscle relaxation skills. Experiment to find what works for you.
5. As and when you feel comfortable, share what you feel you can with adults that you trust. Research shows that keeping it all locked up inside can create further stress. However, don't feel pressured to share what happened. Do it when the time is right and with the people you know can support you through it.
6. Do find time to engage in leisure and recreational activities. Many people feel guilty about enjoying themselves when they have experienced traumatic events or losses. Getting back to your routine and allowing yourself some enjoyment and distraction, and even having fun, is important for your mental health. Feeling guilty about doing so will not only make you feel worse, but it will also reduce your ability to cope.
7. Do try to be kind and compassionate to yourself. You may begin blaming yourself, doubt your sense of worth (e.g., no one will love me again) or your ability to cope (e.g., I don't have the strength to go on) because of the trauma you just experienced. Remember, what happened to you is not your fault and trauma does not alter your worth or your ability to cope with life.
8. Do allow yourself to be in situations, people and places that remind you of the trauma but are objectively safe - repeatedly facing these reminders instead of avoiding them will reduce your anxiety over time even if your anxiety is temporarily high when you initially face your fears.

9. Do recognize that you cannot control everything. Although you should protect yourself from high-risk situations in your environment, acknowledge that we all accept some measure of risk to live healthy, productive lives every day.
10. Do try and view the future with some measure of optimism. Findings suggest that people who view traumatic situations as time limited, terrible experiences that do not necessarily have negative implications for the future and those who find some elements of personal growth in it, are more likely to recover quickly. By contrast, those who assume that their lives have permanently changed for the worse (e.g., nothing will ever be the same again; my life has been destroyed forever) are less likely to do so.
11. Do believe in resilience of the human spirit. Research finds that most people who have experienced trauma recover on their own. The odds are in your favor. You are likely to feel better soon.
12. Do recognize when you need professional help and do not be afraid of seeking it. There is no reason to suffer on your own. There are plenty of research-based treatments that have shown to be tremendously effective in helping people overcome posttraumatic stress, anxiety, and depression.

What things may be better for me not to do?

1. Do not repeatedly watch news reports on TV or social media. Keeping up with the news is important but repeatedly watching news reports will increase your anxiety and will make you believe that there is more danger in the world than there actually is. The media tend to present news in an unnecessarily dramatic fashion and tend to catastrophize information.
2. Do not suppress your painful thoughts or emotions. People who are traumatized often have repeated, intrusive thoughts or images of the trauma that keep playing in their heads and experience a variety of negative emotions including anxiety, sadness, guilt, shame, anger and more. If you find that you are experiencing negative emotions of thoughts, you may have the urge to suppress them. Don't. Trying to suppress your thoughts and feelings can have the reverse effect. Paradoxically, the more you try to stop your thoughts and emotions, the stronger they become.
3. Do not assume that what happened to you will happen again. The recency bias states that shortly after a negative traumatic event occurs, we tend to overestimate the likelihood of it occurring again. Although what you experienced is very real, take comfort in knowing that just because it happened once, does not mean it will happen to you again.
4. Do not make the problem worse than it is already.
 - a) Research shows that if you judge yourself for what happened or judge yourself for how you are reacting or for not reacting enough, or judge others in your life, you are likely to feel worse over time.
 - b) If you assume that the worst will happen (e.g., this could happen to me again), or if you generalize the threat (e.g., all men are going to rape me), you are more likely to suffer from anxiety and other negative emotions than if you assume a more balanced perspective (e.g., what happened to me is awful and I can handle it).
5. Do not avoid situations or places where the objective risk of danger is absent or low just because it reminds you of the trauma or because you are afraid. Research shows that avoiding things that you are afraid of might make you feel better temporarily, but it leads to more avoidance and increases anxiety and worry in the long run. If you avoid these experiences, you will begin to believe that you are safe only because you are avoiding those

places. It will prevent you from realizing that that these situations are safe and that your anxiety would slowly go down even if you entered those situations.

6. Do not engage in unhealthy or excessive escape behaviors (e.g., alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes, TV, movies) or use excessive forms of distraction (e.g., watching TV or movies all day, distracting yourself from painful thoughts). Although allowing yourself to experience pleasure is important and distracting yourself at times may be useful when stress levels are high, excessive distraction and other escape behaviors may ultimately increase your anxiety in the long run.
7. Do not blame yourself for the way you are feeling or reacting (e.g., I must be very mentally unstable if I feel this way). Strong emotions such as anxiety, anger, etc that feel out of control are common when people have experienced trauma, and usually subside naturally. Criticizing yourself will make you feel guilty and ashamed and will only add to the array of negative emotions you are currently experiencing.
8. Do not blame yourself for something you feel you should have done or not done (e.g., I should have been nicer to him; I should not have gone there). Blaming yourself cannot change the past and is unfair to you. 'Monday morning quarterbacking' is unhelpful and will only compound the problem. Blaming yourself will only add guilt and shame in addition to the anxiety and sadness you are already experiencing.
9. Do not discuss every detail of the trauma and world events in detail with young children.
10. Do not forget to review the "Do list" above when you feel bad. The human spirit is resilient, and the odds are in your favor that you will feel better soon. Following these strategies can help maintain your personal resilience.

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Padesky, C. A., Candido, D., Cohen, A., Gluhoski, V., McGinn, L. K., Sisti, M., Westover, S. (2002). *The trauma task force report*. From <http://academyofcbt.org>