

## H2-4 Coping with a Traumatic Event

### What Are Some Common Responses to Traumatic Events?

A person's response to a traumatic event may vary. Responses include feelings of fear, grief and depression. Physical and behavioral responses include nausea, dizziness, and changes in appetite and sleep pattern as well as withdrawal from daily activities. Responses to trauma can last for weeks to months before people start to feel normal again, but most people report feeling better within three months after a traumatic event. If the problems become worse or last longer than one month after the event, the person may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

### What Is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an intense physical and emotional response to thoughts and reminders of the event that last for many weeks or months after the traumatic event. The symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, and extreme emotional and physical reactions to reminders of the event. People with PTSD may stay away from activities, places, thoughts, or feelings related to the trauma or feeling detached or estranged from others. They may also experience symptoms of increased arousal, including insomnia, anger, difficulty concentrating and being overly alert or easily startled.

### What Can You Do for Yourself?

There are many things you can do to cope with traumatic events.

- Understand that your symptoms may be normal, especially right after the trauma.
- Keep to your usual routine.
- Take the time to resolve day-to-day conflicts so they do not add to your stress.
- Do not shy away from situations, people and places that remind you of the trauma.
- Find ways to relax and be kind to yourself.
- Turn to family, friends, and clergy person for support, and talk about your experiences and feelings with them.
- Participate in leisure and recreational activities.
- Recognize that you cannot control everything.
- Recognize the need for trained help, and call a local mental health center.

### What Can You Do for Your Child?

- Let your child know that it is okay to feel upset when something bad or scary happens.
- Encourage your child to express feelings and thoughts, without making judgments.
- Return to daily routines.

### When Should You Contact Your Doctor or Mental Health Professional?

You may need to consider seeking professional help if your symptoms affect your relationship with your family and friends, or affect your job. If you suspect that you or someone you know has PTSD, talk with a health care provider or call your local mental health clinic.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2003. *Coping with Trauma* ([http://www.cdc.gov/masstrauma/factsheets/public/coping\\_with\\_trauma.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/masstrauma/factsheets/public/coping_with_trauma.htm); retrieved April 13, 2003).