



Coping with Post-Traumatic Stress

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PURPOSE

This Bulletin provides information on managing stress following a traumatic event within your community or at Department of Energy (DOE) facilities.

BACKGROUND

Traumatic stress can cause an anxiety disorder called post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Traumatic incidents can produce unusually strong emotional reactions that may interfere with your ability to function at the scene or afterwards. It is typical for people to experience a variety of emotions following an exposure to catastrophic events, e.g. where colleagues or others are taken hostage, severely injured, or killed. If the symptoms last longer than 4 weeks, cause you great distress, or interfere with your work or home life, you probably have PTSD.

SYMPTOMS of TRAUMATIC STRESS

Symptoms may occur immediately after a traumatic event or may be a delayed reaction to the stress. These feelings can include shock, sorrow, numbness, fear, anger, disillusionment, and grief. You may find that you have trouble sleeping, recurrent nightmares, concentrating, eating or remembering even simple tasks. These are common and normal reactions. If you should experience chest pain, difficulty breathing, long term nausea or mental distress, you may need to seek medical attention or mental health support.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Recognize and accept what you cannot change.

Give yourself time to experience your feelings and to recover - Remember that "getting back to normal" takes time. The symptoms of PTSD should pass after a while. Over time, the caring support of family and friends can help to lessen the emotional impact and ultimately make the changes brought about by the tragedy more acceptable.

Talk about it - It often helps to speak with others who have shared your experience so you do not feel so different or alone.

Turn it off and take a break - While getting the news from the internet, television, newspapers or magazines is informative, being overexposed to it may actually increase your stress.

Take care of your-self - Avoid excess alcohol and drugs. Maintain as normal a schedule as possible and establish or reestablish routines such as eating meals at regular times and maintain physical activity in your day. If you are having trouble sleeping, try some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, pleasant reading, or yoga.

Assistance at DOE sites - Medical and employee assistance programs can provide further help.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Your Safety and Health Office
- Department of Veterans Affairs
<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/information/>
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/unp-trinstrs.html>
- American Psychological Association
<http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/article.php?id=151>

SUMMARY

It is important to remember that strong emotions are normal reactions to an abnormal situation and will gradually decrease over time. Assistance is available for those who need further help. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Bill McArthur by telephone at (301) 903-9674 or at bill.mcarthur@hq.doe.gov.

(Signed by)

Glenn S. Podonsky
Chief Health, Safety and Security Officer
Office of Health, Safety and Security



PREVENT EVENTS

Learning from Industry Experience

PREVENT EVENTS is intended for use by personnel during morning meetings, pre-job briefings, and work unit meetings to communicate key industry experience.

Management:

1. Do we have a written program and procedures to help ensure that people touched by trauma recover?
2. Do we have a plan for counseling after traumatic events?
3. Under what circumstances does the post event assistance program require mandatory counseling?
4. Have supervisors been made aware of traumatic stress and PTSD and given training to help deal with it, as they are often the first on the scene of an event and deal with its initial impact?
5. Do we provide post-event lessons learned for managers, supervisors, first aid responders, and safety personnel?

Supervisors and Workers:

1. I am having nightmares and having a hard time sleeping since the traumatic event. Is this a normal reaction to the event?
2. Where can I get information on PTSD?
3. Does our site have a plan for counseling after traumatic events?
4. Whom do we contact for emotional assistance and counseling of needs?
5. At what point do we need to seek medical attention or mental health support?