

Services available

At any time, it is possible to ask for help from a health and social services professional. It's free and confidential.

- > Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS)
- > Info-Santé and Info-Social: 8-1-1
- > Physician
- > Suicide prevention:
1-866-APPELLE (277-3553)

Information is also available on the following websites:

- > Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
www.msss.gouv.qc.ca
- > Info-trauma
www.info-trauma.org
- > Centre d'étude sur le trauma
www.plusqu1souvenir.ca
- > Urgence Québec
www.urgencequebec.gouv.qc.ca



COPING WITH A TRAUMATIC EVENT

A traumatic event confronts individuals directly with death or the fear of dying, or may have threatened their own or another person's physical integrity. This event occurred suddenly, intensely, unpredictably and uncontrollably. It triggered a strong reaction, a feeling of powerlessness or horror. A traumatic event may occur during an accident, a violent act or a disaster, or in other situations.

This is an information tool for people directly or indirectly affected by a traumatic event, especially a disaster. It presents information on frequent reactions, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and ways to take care of oneself and consult the available resources.

Frequent reactions when confronted with a disaster

Various reactions are frequently reported after a disaster. They may be:

PHYSICAL REACTIONS: Headaches, pain, increase in heart rate, insomnia, hyperagitation, tremors, fatigue, gastrointestinal problem, etc.

PSYCHOEMOTIONAL REACTIONS: Concentration and attention difficulties, confusion, feeling overwhelmed, memory loss, difficulty making decisions, feeling frozen in place, sadness, fear, anxious or depressive mood, guilt, etc.

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS: Irritability, isolation, eating disorders, overconsumption of alcohol, drugs or medications, conflict with the people around you, etc.

Usually, these reactions are short term - from a few days to a few weeks. Some situations experienced in the past may also resurface and bring up difficult and unpleasant memories. Finally, the intensity and duration of these reactions may vary according to the person's age, state of health and level of exposure to the traumatic event.

For more information, see "After a disaster".

It is important to remember that these reactions are normal when faced with a situation that is abnormal.

Furthermore, some people risk developing post-traumatic stress disorder.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

Post-traumatic stress disorder is defined as “a reactive condition that may develop after a traumatic event”.

The physical and psychological symptoms described below may appear rapidly, several weeks or even several months after being confronted, directly or indirectly, with a traumatic event. In the case of PTSD, instead of fading away, these symptoms are established chronically and are felt with the same intensity as during the first exposure to the traumatizing situation. It is estimated that one out of ten people confronted with a traumatic event will develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

Individuals who develop post-traumatic stress disorder may exhibit the following symptoms:

Intrusions: Individuals are invaded by images, sounds, odours and emotions that remind them of the event (flashback). They may also have nightmares and continually have the impression of reliving the event or fear that it will happen again.

Avoidance: Consciously or unconsciously, individuals constantly seek to avoid everything that could be a reminder of the event. It is difficult to talk about it and they make efforts to avoid painful memories of the traumatic event.

Physical symptoms and hypervigilance: Individuals can have headaches and other physical pains, sleep disorders, tremors, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, anger, agitation, attention and concentration difficulties, etc. They are constantly on high alert and jumpy, even in the absence of danger.

People may also have difficulty remembering important aspects of the event. They may feel guilty, have strong emotions and show a lessening of interest in pre-disaster activities. They may also feel detached from close relations and exhibit a negative mood.

Other symptoms (panic attacks and other anxiety disorders, depression, abuse of alcohol, drugs or medications, etc.) may also be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.

If these symptoms persist for more than four weeks, it is important to consult a health and social services professional to evaluate your situation and receive the appropriate services.

Ideas for taking care of yourself

It is possible to target certain means of coping with such an event and integrate them into your everyday life. There are many coping mechanisms, which are often readily accessible:

- > Accept how you have reacted since the event. Tell yourself that your symptoms are normal when faced with a traumatic situation.
- > Don't stay alone. Talk about your experience with a trusted person. Repressing your emotions will only defer the problems. Don't hesitate to express your expectations and your needs to people around you.
- > Resume your usual activities as soon as possible, depending on your capacity. Continue to engage in daily routine and your leisure activities. Exercise can be beneficial.
- > Don't avoid people, places or situations that remind you of the event. This avoidance will only defer the problems.
- > Don't let your everyday difficulties accumulate. Take one problem at a time and provide a solution. Accept the fact that you can't control everything.
- > Avoid abuse of alcohol, drugs or medication. Even if it seems to help initially, overconsumption of these products will only aggravate your symptoms.
- > Learn about post-traumatic stress disorder from reliable and recognized information sources. This will help you understand your situation better.

When is it necessary to ask for help?

When it becomes difficult to function normally in your family or conjugal relations, at work or at school, it is recommended that you consult a service qualified in dealing with these problems.