



COPING WITH A POTENTIALLY TRAUMATIC EVENT

Directly confronting death, the fear of dying, or a threat to our physical integrity can be potentially traumatic events. Such sudden, intense events are unforeseeable and uncontrollable. They provoke a strong reaction, a feeling of powerlessness, or horror. Accidents, violent acts, or disasters are potentially traumatic events.

This information sheet is intended for individuals who have confronted a potentially traumatic event, especially a disaster. It presents information on common reactions, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and avenues for self-care and consulting the resources available.

Common reactions to disasters

Various reactions are frequently reported following a disaster. Such reactions can be:

PHYSICAL: headaches, pain, increased heart rate, insomnia, hyper-agitation, trembling, fatigue, and gastrointestinal problems;

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL: concentration or attention deficits, feeling overwhelmed, memory loss, difficulty making decisions, a feeling of being stuck, sadness, fear, an anxious or depressive mood, guilt and more;

BEHAVIOURAL: irritability, isolation, dietary problems, excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs or medications, medications, conflicts with those in proximity and more.

Such reactions are usually short-lived and last from several days to several weeks. Past experiences can also resurface and rekindle difficult, unpleasant memories. Lastly, the intensity and duration of such reactions can vary according to age, experience, state of health, and level of exposure to the potentially traumatic event.

To obtain additional information, please consult the "A disaster has occurred" information sheet.

It should be noted that the reactions are normal when facing a situation that is not normal.

Moreover, some individuals may experience post-traumatic stress disorder.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a reactional state that can arise in the wake of a traumatic event.

The physical and psychic symptoms described below can appear suddenly, several weeks or even several months after an individual has directly or indirectly faced a potentially traumatic event. In the case of PTSD, the symptoms, instead of resolving, become chronic and are felt with the same intensity as when the individual was first exposed to the traumatic situation. It is estimated that one person in 10 who has faced a potentially traumatic event will develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms

Individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder can display the symptoms indicated below.

Intrusions: individuals are overcome by images, sounds, smells, and emotions in flashbacks that remind them of the event. They can also have nightmares and constantly have the impression of reliving the event or that it will recur.

Avoidance behaviour: the individuals constantly seek consciously or unconsciously to avoid everything that might remind them of the event. It is difficult for them to talk about it, and they seek to avoid distressing memories of the event.

Physical symptoms and hypervigilance: the individuals can experience headaches and other physical pain, sleep problems, trembling, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, anger, agitation, and attention and concentration deficits. They are constantly on the look-out and jump easily despite the absence of danger.

They can also have difficulty remembering significant aspects of the event. They can feel guilty, experience strong emotions, and reduced interest in activities in which they engaged prior to the disaster. They can also feel detached from their loved ones and display negative moods.

What is more, other symptoms such as anxiety, panic attacks, depression, depressive symptoms, and excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs or medications can also be linked to post-traumatic stress disorder.

If the symptoms persist, it is important to consult a health and social services professional to accurately assess the situation and to receive the appropriate services.

Self-care

It is possible to target and incorporate into our daily lives the means to confront such an event. The means are numerous and readily accessible.

Accept how you have reacted since the event. Tell yourself that your symptoms are normal faced with such a situation.

Do not stay alone. Share your experience with a support person. Suppressing your emotions will only postpone the problems. Do not hesitate to share with the people around you your expectations and needs.

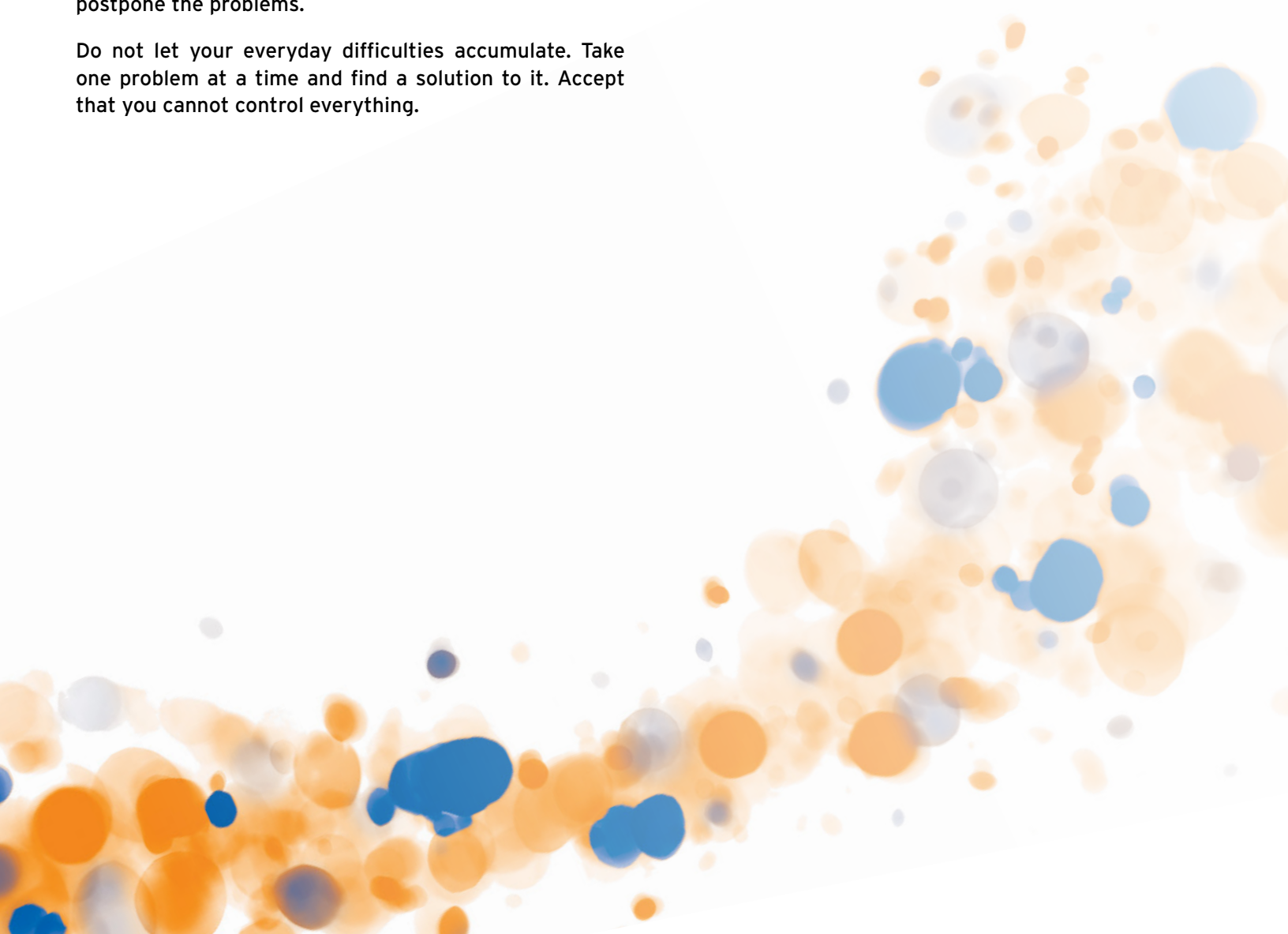
As soon as possible and as soon as you can do so, resume your usual activities. Maintain your daily routine. Continue to engage in leisure activities. Exercise can be beneficial.

Do not avoid people, places, and situations that remind you of the event. Such avoidance behaviour will only postpone the problems.

Do not let your everyday difficulties accumulate. Take one problem at a time and find a solution to it. Accept that you cannot control everything.

Avoid consuming alcohol or drugs. Even if it initially seems to help, excessive consumption of such products will only aggravate your symptoms.

Find out about post-traumatic stress disorder from reliable, recognized information sources. This will enable you to better understand your situation.



When is it necessary to ask for help?

It is appropriate to consult a qualified service in this respect when it becomes difficult to function normally in family and conjugal relationships and at work or in school.

Available services

- > Info-Social 811
- > Family medicine group (FMG)
- > Suicide Prevention:
1-866-APPELLE (277-3553)
- > Centre d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels (CAVAC)
1-866-532-2822

Information is also available at the following links:

- > Getting better following a disaster
www.quebec.ca/en/public-safety-emergencies/emergency-situations-disasters-and-natural-hazards/getting-better-following-disaster
- > Info-trauma www.info-trauma.org/en/home
- > Trauma Studies Center trauma.criusmm.net/en/
- > Urgence Québec www.quebec.ca/en/public-safety-emergencies