

Effective Ways of Coping After a Traumatic Event

1. Accept the fact you have been a victim and accept the feelings that result. **Remember:** others may not validate your feeling. In fact, they may minimize your experience: "you were only a witness" or "you were really lucky" or "its been two weeks - why are you still bothered".
2. Accept **all** of the feelings you are having as normal reactions to an extraordinary event. You are not "crazy." You are reacting normally to a "crazy" event. Be **patient** with yourself. It takes time to recover emotionally from a traumatic event.
3. Combat any guilt you might have by:
 - accepting it as normal.
 - talking to others about your role and their role during the event. You are probable not alone in your reaction to this event.
 - realizing you were a victim yourself and not a trained rescuer.
 - recognizing what you "did right."
 - recognizing the extenuating circumstances related to the event—the suddenness, the dangerousness, etc.
4. **Don't revert to "bad habits"** (alcohol, drugs, overeating) to cope. They will only make matters worse.
5. **Maintain Normalcy.** Go about your daily routines and "take care of business".
6. Attempt to understand "What happened" by getting the facts.
7. **Ventilate:** talk about the event and write about it.
8. **Thank** those who helped you, and apologize to those you hurt during and since the tragic event.
9. **Help Each Other**
 - Reach out to support those who are particularly traumatized (See Emotional First Aid Skills)
 - Respect each others way of coping. Don't victimize each other by judging each others individual coping style. Let the "grievors" grieve and allow the "doers" to do.
10. **Decide As A Group How You Want To Help:**
 - the victim
 - the family
 - each other
11. **If Death Has Occurred:** Implement or participate in a "Saying Goodbye" ritual
 - attend services
 - contribute to a memorial fund
 - establish a memorial on scene
 - wear a symbol on clothing
12. Maintain a "continuing relationship" with the victim. It is quite normal and helpful to **reminisce** about the victim and to find ways of "keeping his memory alive."
13. Deal with **Bad memories** by expanding your "memory tape" to include good memories.
 - when bad memories of the event occur, immediately replace that memory with a memory of the entire day.
 - include good memories of the victim in your memory tape.
14. Allow your experience of this tragic event make you a better person.
 - identify what this tragedy has taught you.
 - incorporate what you have learned/realized into your "new life."