



Northern Light
HealthSM

STRENGTHEN ME

When Tragedy Strikes: Tips and Tools



Northern LightSM Healthy Life EAP



Objectives

- **Review typical signs and symptoms of mind/body response to traumatic stress**
- **Identify strategies to support ourselves and others**
- **Explore radical self care and mindfulness as tools to sustain value-centered living**

Defining “Trauma”

An experience that causes intense physical and psychological stress reactions.

“Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” (SAMHSA, 2012)

Typical Traumatic Stress Symptoms



Physical Reactions

- Nausea, Gastrointestinal distress
- Sweating, shivering
- Faintness, dizziness
- Muscle tremors, weakness
- Elevated heartbeat, respiration, blood pressure
- Uncoordinated movements
- Overwhelmed
- Extreme fatigue, exhaustion
- Headache
- Narrowed visual field



Emotional Reactions

- Numbness, anxiety, fear
- Rapidly shifting emotions
- Guilt, survivor guilt
- Exhilaration, survivor joy
- Anger, sadness
- Helplessness, feeling detachment
- Feeling unreal
- Disorientation
- Feeling out of control
- Denial, constriction of feelings
- Strong identification with victims



Cognitive Reactions

- Difficulty concentrating
- Racing, circular thoughts
- Slowed thinking
- Memory problems
- Confusion, difficulty naming objects
- Impaired problem-solving, calculations
- Difficulty making decisions
- Intrusive images of disaster
- Loss of perspective
- Loss of ability to conceptualize, prioritize



Behavioral Reactions

- Startled reaction, restlessness
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Difficulty expressing oneself
- Constant talking
- Arguments, angry outbursts
- Withdrawal and apathy
- Exaggerated “gallows” humor
- Slowed reactions, accident prone
- Inability to rest or let go
- Increased use of alcohol and tobacco

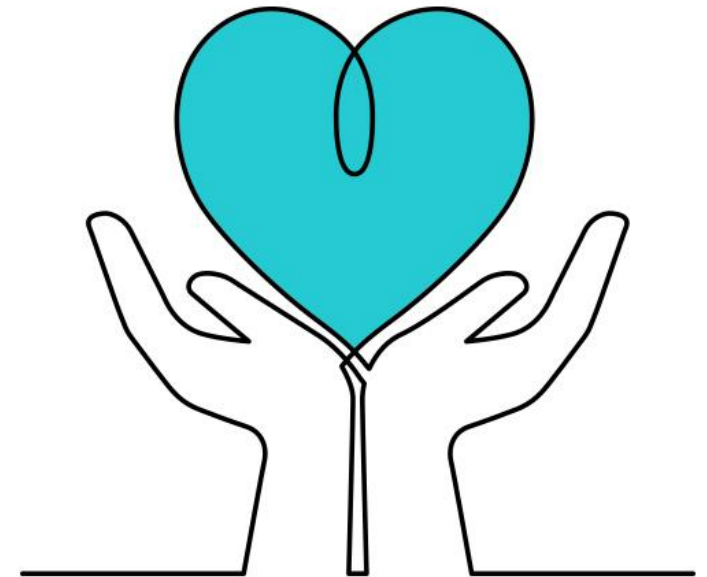
The “Do’s” of taking care of yourself and others....

- Talk to others about your experience.
- Use all resources available if you are having difficulty talking to family or friends
- Realize there are no “normal reactions”
- Maintain usual social contacts and stay connected to others
- Remain active and try to keep your regular schedules/activities
- Limit alcohol and other controlled substances
- Try to increase your level of physical activity, exercise
- If you have problems eating, try eating frequent small amounts of healthy food

.....And the “Do Nots”

- If sleep is disturbed, don't toss and turn. Get up and read or watch television etc.
- Don't be afraid talk about it, to ask for support
- Don't make any major decisions

Don't expect to “get over it” quickly - Be patient with yourself



Radical Self Care

Physical

- Eating, Sleeping, Moving

Psychological

- Notice your narrative, accept help, give yourself credit

Behavioral

- Downtime is not a luxury, it is a necessity



Values-Centered Healing

- What is important to you?
- How can I take action?
- Consider:
 - Volunteering
 - Donating
 - Connecting



When to seek professional support

Traumatic stress red flags include:

- It's been six weeks, and you're not feeling any better.
- You're having trouble functioning at home and work.
- You're experiencing terrifying memories, nightmares, or flashbacks.
- You're having an increasingly difficult time connecting and relating to others.
- You're experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings.
- You're avoiding more and more things that remind you of the disaster or traumatic event.

Ask for Help

Reach out to professional resources such as clergy, medical, and behavioral health professionals.

Strengthen ME/ Healthy Life EAP is here for your individual, confidential support.

**For more information, call 1.800.769.9819 or send an email to
StrengthenME@northernlight.org**