

# NORMAL RESPONSES to TRAUMATIC EVENTS



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*These notes are provided for the general good and can be shared and circulated freely*



*Fullness of life for all,  
in a transformed  
Nepali society*

## WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA?

- 'Trauma' means a wound
- Psychological trauma is a wound to the 'Psyche' or mind
- Just as physical wounds heal over time by natural means so too wounded minds heal through natural processes
- Traumatic events can wound our minds due to the overload of sensory information about something outside our usual experience that hits us in a short space of time.

## IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- Full recovery (in weeks or a few months) is the normal outcome for people who have experienced a traumatic event
- In the beginning most trauma symptoms protect us from being overwhelmed. They only become a problem if they don't go away
- Children can learn coping skills that will help them in the future when they meet other difficulties
- Reactions can be delayed. Particularly at risk are those who have immediately had to take on significant responsibility for family, friends, and within organisations

## NORMAL RESPONSES

### Intrusive Symptoms

- Recurrent involuntary memories
- Traumatic nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Emotional distress after exposure to things that remind you of the traumatic event
- Odd bodily sensations & pains

### Avoidance of things that remind you of the traumatic event

- Trying to block out Trauma-related thoughts or feelings (sometimes by use of drugs/alcohol)
- Avoiding reminders eg. people, places, activities, or situations associated with the traumatic event

### Changes in thinking and mood

- Cannot remember some parts of the traumatic event
- Negative beliefs eg., 'I am bad', 'I am to blame', 'The world is completely dangerous'
- Feelings of fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame
- Reduced interest in (pre-traumatic) significant activities eg. work, hobbies, sports, schoolwork
- Feeling cut off from other people
- Feeling emotionally numb (not experiencing negative or positive emotions)

*No-one is likely to have all these reactions but almost everyone exposed to the event will experience some of them. They will usually gradually reduce in frequency and intensity over time.*

### High arousal of the nervous system

- ➔ Irritable or aggressive behaviour
- ➔ Self-destructive or reckless behaviour
- ➔ Hyper-vigilance
- ➔ Exaggerated startle response
- ➔ Difficult to concentrate
- ➔ Sleep disturbance

### Peoples' biggest issues after trauma can be:

- ➔ Anger
- ➔ Guilt
- ➔ Blame
- ➔ Shame
- ➔ Questions about the meaning of life
- ➔ Depression
- ➔ Relationship difficulties

## BUT, PLEASE NOTE:

*“Not all psychological injury can be encompassed by a list of symptoms or disorders. Trauma can alter the very meaning we give to our lives, and can produce feelings and experiences that are not easily categorised in diagnostic manuals.”*

## FOR FAMILIES

### Impact on children

- ➔ World has become a frightening place – loss of sense of safety
- ➔ They want to stay close to parents/relatives
- ➔ Poor concentration - underachieving at school
- ➔ Go back to the behaviour of a younger child
- ➔ Become more naughty or disobedient
- ➔ Repetitive and/or destructive play

### Impact on parents

- ➔ Less available to meet child's physical and emotional needs (because they are pre-occupied with their own issues)
- ➔ Don't want their children to go out as normal (ie. away from them)
- ➔ Can become too lenient in their management of their children's' behaviours

### Impact on families

- ➔ Family members can feel isolated
- ➔ Difficulty in talking about the traumatic event
- ➔ May be missing a member(s)
- ➔ More arguing due to increase in irritability
- ➔ Confusion - when different people respond in different ways and recover at different speeds

## HOW TO HELP RECOVERY

- ➔ Love the ones you are with
- ➔ Encourage talking (without forcing it)
- ➔ Don't make unrealistic promises to your children
- ➔ Make your home a safe as possible
- ➔ Try and re-establish normal routines (as far as practicable)
- ➔ Try and maintain good self-care
- ➔ Make some allowance for your children's' behavior – but still maintain good behavioral boundaries
- ➔ Don't worry about having trauma symptoms (even though they can be distressing) - just manage/experience them – give it time
- ➔ If symptoms don't go away in 6-8 weeks consider seeking professional help



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