



Supporting Adults affected by major traumatic incidents: Advice for families, friends, caregivers and other supporters

In the *first few days* after the traumatic event:

- It is normal to experience some distress after exposure to a major trauma. This may include difficulties in sleeping, distressing thoughts and memories popping into mind, nightmares, irritability, feelings of helplessness, reliving aspects of what has happened and thinking that you should have done more to help.
- Social support from family, friends and people that are known and trusted is important during the first few days
- It is important to deal with any practical issues such as housing, food, shelter
- Although talking about what happened can be helpful, no-one should be forced to talk about their experiences. For some, it is important to have quiet time to think things through but for others the opportunity to organise what has happened into a coherent story reduces feelings of helplessness
- Trying to get back to the routine things in life can be helpful, for example having times for getting up, going to bed and eating can give a sense of normality to life.
- Spiritual beliefs can be strengthened and tested by disasters. For some people Faith groups can be a source of support
- It is helpful to allow people to make their own decisions about as many things as possible
- For parents and child carers providing open, honest and direct information to children about what is known and explanations of their own and other adult reactions they may have seen can be helpful

In the following weeks and months

- Many people find that their initial difficulties settle down and they are able to return to a more normal life within a few weeks
- In a few people, the problems persist or get more intense
- Sometimes there is a delay in the response to the trauma, the experience of “shock” and unreality allow a gradual intake of what happened
- People can begin to experience other difficulties such as avoiding people or places or developing panic attacks or anxiety when faced with reminders of what happened (high buildings, fire sirens, etc.)
- It is important to check how people are coping after a month to see if more help is required
- There are some very simple surveys which can be used to identify people who are having difficulties (e.g. Brewin Trauma Screening Tool)
- Support is available through GPs who can advise what is available locally and the best way to access help

Helpful links: <http://www.disasteraction.org.uk/> (for those bereaved)

<http://www.saintwilfrids.co.uk/downloads/96955681067800965.pdf> (for children)