

When Should You Seek Professional Help?

Sometimes events are so distressing that professional help is advisable. This is especially the case if the reactions described above last more than four weeks. Watch out for the following signs:

- Persistent sleeping disorders
- Restlessness
- Frequent unwanted memories of the event
- Avoiding situations, locations or activities reminding of the event
- Constant apathy or lethargy, feeling “numb”
- Increased consumption of alcohol and/or drugs
- The condition may even make it impossible for the affected people to cope with daily routines (e.g. household chores or going to work regularly)

Do take these signs seriously! Professional help can prevent negative after-effects or chronic conditions.

Further Information On Where To Get Professional Help

Presented by:

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Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz
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INFORMATION FOR AFFECTED PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

RECOMMENDATIONS HOW TO HANDLE SITUATIONS OF DISTRESS

In this folder we have compiled information that may be important in your situation.

Reactions to an Extremely Distressing Event

Particularly distressing events are a major disruption of normal life. Suddenly affected people lose their daily routines. Immediately after such an event, many people experience strong emotions and reactions, such as

- Helplessness
- Fear
- Despondency
- Feelings of guilt for surviving the event, irrespective of whether justified or not
- Emotional disarray
- Disorientation, not knowing what to do
- Incapacity of doing everyday chores
- Speculating why the event happened

These and similar reactions are normal after an extremely distressing event. They are normal reactions to an “abnormal” event. Most people get over them during the next few days and weeks.

It is, however, possible that there will be further disorders during the next few days or weeks:

- Severe nervousness
- Sleeping disorders, nightmares
- Persistent feeling of futility, hopelessness, loss of previous interests
- Memory gaps, concentration problems
- Stressful memories or images that “haunt” affected people and cannot be repressed
- Physical stress reactions, such as loss of appetite and energy, unusual tiredness
- Increased need for alcohol or tranquilisers

Normally these reactions also wear off in the course of weeks and eventually disappear.

What Can Affected People Do to Help Themselves?

After experiencing a distressing event, it can be helpful to allow yourself a quiet period. Take your time to overcome and recover from what has happened. Other affected people also report relief if you...

- ...pay attention to your momentary needs and take time to meet them.
- ...are supported by your partner, your family and friends and do not hesitate to seek professional help.

- ...talk about your experiences with people who understand your situation.
- ...try not to suppress your feelings and reactions. (Experience shows that this tends to make matters worse).
- ...go back to activities you usually enjoy.

How Can Family Members and Friends Help?

When affected people want to talk about the experiences make sure to listen. Take a lot of time and take their feelings seriously. Distressing events provoke corresponding reactions. These are normal and usually go away after some time. Understanding family members and friends can help affected people to get over the distressing event faster.

After some exceptional events it is necessary to organize things, for example there may be paperwork to do. Practical assistance with these tasks can also be very helpful. In principle, however, it is important to assist affected people so he/she can resume normal daily routine as soon as possible.

Often the affected people already feel better when he/she is not left alone.