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Managing Your Emotions in the Aftermath of Violence

Violence may bring about a roller coaster ride of emotions in you and others. We are all unique in how we respond to life's stressors. Exposure to direct or indirect violence is a significant stressor that may result in a wide range of normal emotions and reactions, such as:

- Uncertainty/fear
- Anxious/overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyper alert to environment
- Feeling tired/exhausted
- Restlessness/agitation
- Appetite changes
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- Nausea/stomach issues

These responses are very natural, normal reactions to a stressful event. The full force of emotional reactions may come a few days or even weeks after the incident occurs. It is important to pay attention to your unique response and reactions.

We often replay the traumatic experience repeatedly in our minds. We often ask ourselves questions such as: What if ..., Why did they... These questions often hurt us rather than helping us best cope and bounce back from difficult situations.

Here are Suggestions for Helping Yourself and Others

- Talk about the incident and how it impacts you personally to someone you trust when you are ready.
- Be understanding that this incident may trigger other emotions and reactions from one's past.
- Your perceptions and reactions to an incident may be very different than others based upon past experiences, beliefs, and coping skills.
- Try to maintain your daily routines and structure your time. You will likely find that maintaining your routine will help gain back a sense of control and order in your life.
- Listen. When others talk about their experiences and reactions, their emotional load seems lighter to bear. One of the best ways you can help is to just listen. You don't have to come up with solutions or answers. It's okay if someone breaks down and cries.
- Exercise - Many people find that physical exercise helps them to better cope and relax.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it.)
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are not uncommon - don't try to fight them - they should decrease over time and become less painful.
- You are encouraged not to make any major decisions immediately following a traumatic event (such as job change, physical relocation, etc.). Focus on managing your current stressors before adding new ones.
- Be a support to others. Show by words and actions that you care. Go ahead and act. Don't be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. Small, kind deeds and sincere expressions of affection or admiration also will mean a lot.