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Witnesses of Road Trauma

If you have been involved in, witnessed or assisted at the scene of a fatal or serious collision it is important for you to acknowledge that you have experienced a traumatic event and may experience a range of confusing or distressing reactions.

Trauma reactions

There are a number of common trauma reactions, including:

- Anger, irritability, panic attacks and difficulty concentrating
- Numbness, shock, denial and self-blame
- Flashbacks, nightmares and reliving some aspect of what happened
- A withdrawal from others, avoidance of reminders (e.g. the location of the crash).

People can also become preoccupied with what happened at the crash and find that they are unable to think about anything else. Basic assumptions about safety and the world can be shattered leading to a feeling that nowhere and nothing is safe.

Fear of driving and your own safety and fear of having your loved ones drive or being a passenger is also a common.

Survivor Guilt

It is not unusual for people to feel critical of themselves, what they did or should have done. Where this happens there may be feelings of responsibility and guilt. If you were first on the scene and tried to help someone seriously injured you may feel a bond with that person which others find hard to understand. You may feel very strongly for those who have died and the families they have left behind.

These are all very normal reactions and to be expected in the aftermath of a traumatic event of this kind.

Who can help?

Talking about what has happened is helpful. While family and friends can be very supportive it can sometimes be useful to find someone outside your immediate network. Often you may face difficulty to talk to family, as some of them may also be grieving or because you feel that you need to remain strong for your family. Your GP should be your first contact and may be able to refer you to a counsellor experienced in working with trauma and grief.

What can help?

Acknowledging that you have been through a traumatic event and need time to re balance and come to terms with what you have experienced is important. Trauma reactions are normal and usually fade after a few months. It is best not to worry about them as they will normally decrease in frequency and intensity as time passes.

- Exercising is a very good way of “processing” traumatic thoughts and feelings and can be extremely beneficial in aiding sleep
- Keeping a journal/diary as writing can be very therapeutic.
- Eating a healthy diet which includes lots of fresh fruit and vegetables will help
- Avoiding alcohol or drugs to “numb” the pain will help you recover quicker
- Watch out for drinks which contain caffeine as these may stop you sleeping and increase your panic symptoms
- Try to get a pattern into your day by organising your time and planning a time to get up, to meet friends, be with family and to do your chores

If your reactions get worse or are not improving after several weeks, talk to your GP about an assessment for trauma therapy

RoadPeace Support Services

RoadPeace provides a number of support services which may help you during this distressing time.

- The RoadPeace support helpline is run by volunteers who have also suffered as result of a road crash. RoadPeace volunteers understand the importance of talking about what has happened and can be contacted on the **Helpline** which is open Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm **0845 4500 355**.
- Our befriender service allows you to talk to someone who is in a similar circumstance and has a deeper understanding of what you are going through. This service is usually via the phone, however in some instances where the befriender is located close to you, face to face meetings are also possible.
- The RoadPeace Resilience Building Support Programme is a six week group support program facilitated by trained trauma specialists, which provides skills to help cope with trauma following bereavement after a road crash.

For more information about RoadPeace Support Services please contact us on 0845 4500 355 or email helpline@roadpeace.org.