

WITNESSING A TRAUMATIC EVENT

This handout may be helpful for those who have witnessed a traumatic event and those who support them.

How a traumatic event can impact you

A traumatic event can affect you emotionally, physically and mentally. These reactions are normal and will usually pass within a few weeks. Below are some common feelings you may have after a traumatic event.

- › Continued thoughts and images of the event.
- › Wanting to stay away from the scene of the event and/or fear of returning to work.
- › Difficulty concentrating, or feeling dazed or confused.
- › Difficulty handling tasks or making decisions.
- › Aimless wandering or just sitting and staring without direction.
- › Feelings of guilt or wishing you could have done something different.
- › Wanting to separate yourself from family, coworkers and friends.
- › Nightmares and/or trouble sleeping.
- › Headaches or other physical reactions such as an upset stomach or feeling tired all the time.
- › Using alcohol or drugs to numb your feelings.

How to take care of yourself after a traumatic event

If you have seen or been through a traumatic event, it may take time to return to activities you enjoy. The following may be helpful as you move forward.

- › **Talk to someone.** Talking about it may feel uncomfortable, but it may help you feel better.
- › **Avoid** using alcohol or drugs as way of coping.
- › **Limit exposure to news stories** about the event.
- › **Keep active.** Physical activity can be a good way to reduce stress.
- › **Eat well and get enough sleep to feel rested.** Feeling physically healthy can help you feel emotionally strong.
- › **Do something comforting for yourself.** Take time for yourself and activities that feel calming. For example, keep busy with hobbies. Spend time with pets. Get away to a spot where you feel your best.
- › **Use your support system.** Reach out to friends, your partner, family, spiritual community, or a counselor. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

How to support someone who has experienced a traumatic event

It can be hard to know what to say or do when someone has experienced a traumatic event. Here are some ways to be supportive during a difficult time.

- › Listen. Ask questions respectfully. If the person seems uncomfortable talking about it, let them know that you're available if they want to talk.
- › Don't take the person's reactions (e.g., anger, withdrawal, irritability) personally. These are normal reactions to a traumatic event.
- › Avoid clichés like "I know how you feel" or "Everything will be all right." "Everything happens for a reason."
- › Be honest. If you don't know what to say, simply say that.
- › Provide a place of safety. Just "be there" for them. Periods of silence can be soothing.
- › Allow them to react in their own way. There is no "right" response. Tears and even laughter can help us release emotions and move toward balance.
- › Don't try to fix it. Spending time together is enough.
- › Lower expectations for a while. Those who have experienced a traumatic event often have a hard time concentrating and making decisions. They may struggle to stay on task and complete their work.
- › Offer support with simple things, such as picking up some of their workload (with your manager's permission), cooking a meal, taking them out to dinner, or running errands for them.

This material is provided by Cigna for informational/educational purposes only. It is not intended as medical/clinical advice. Only a health care professional can make a diagnosis or recommend a treatment plan. For more information about your behavioral health coverage, you can call the customer service or the behavioral health telephone number listed on your health care identification card.

All Cigna products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Cigna Corporation.

Use and distribution limited solely to authorized personnel. 837890c 07/18 © 2018 Cigna.

