

Trauma Support - Information sheet T2

10 tips for supporting yourself after a traumatic event:

1. **Relaxation.** Our body is on hyperalert when we have experienced a trauma. Therefore the first thing we must learn to do is relax. We can do this with a simple breathing exercise: breathe in for six seconds, hold the breath for seven seconds and breathe out for eight seconds.
2. **Normalisation.** Often people think they are going crazy after a traumatic event as the symptoms are so overwhelming. Read information about trauma symptoms (see my information sheet on trauma symptoms T1). Your symptoms are a normal reaction to an abnormal event.
3. **Diet and exercise.** Eat a regular and healthy diet. Often people have an urge to eat unhealthy and sugary foods when traumatised. This will magnify the trauma symptoms and make you feel worse. Also caffeine has a negative impact. It is important to exercise. Your body will be full of adrenalin and the best way to release this is through exercise, even a gradual walk each day will help. Exercise produces serotonin, which is a feel good hormone.
4. **Avoid alcohol & nicotine.** Often individuals turn to alcohol and nicotine to self-medicate. Both of these substances will increase the intensity of the trauma symptoms.
5. **Safe place.** Another exercise you can do to help relax your body and reassure you that you are safe is to do the safe place exercise. Imagine a time when you were totally relaxed and happy. Make this memory one where you are still and on your own. Become aware of all your senses as you memorise this event: what did you see, feel, hear, taste, touch and smell? This will help to bring the memory alive and become a resource to use when you start to feel anxious.
6. **Anchor.** Having an anchor is a good way of grounding and reassuring yourself. An anchor could be: a photo, an item that brings you happiness, a poem, a prayer or a crystal, to name a few. Ideally think of something small that you can carry around in your pocket.
7. **Gradual exposure.** If you find that you are avoiding a place, event, situation that reminds you of the trauma, write a 10 step plan of gradual exposure. For example, I saw someone who had experienced a Road Traffic Accident; her 10 steps included: opening the car door, sitting in the driver seat, turning on the ignition, driving down the road and back, and gradually building up to driving to the place the accident happened. It is important these steps are small and manageable. Rate your anxiety level out of 10 for each step as you are about to do it. If the next step rates over five (10 being the most anxious) then add another step that reduces your anxiety level to five or below.
8. **Avoid stimuli.** In the initial stages it is important to calm your body down. Therefore if you find watching the news or specific programmes makes you feel worse avoid watching them for a while.
9. **Talking about the trauma.** It helps to talk about the trauma to the right people at the right time. Some days you will feel more anxious than others; some days you will notice it helps you to talk about the trauma and others make you feel worse.
10. **Specialist Help.** If you want specialist help visit my website www.fionadunkley.com and contact me. If you decide to see a therapist make sure they are a trauma expert. EMDR is a technique that works well in trauma recovery see <http://www.emdrassociation.org.uk>.