



# Supporting a survivor of trauma

Even if you don't encounter a traumatic event directly, trauma can affect you. This is called vicarious trauma. It can be provoked not just by the event itself, but by live coverage of the event or later during anniversaries of the event.



## The effects of trauma

Victims of trauma face a wide range of struggles. They often question what has happened or what they may have done to cause or prevent it. Many wonder how they will heal and why they cannot connect with their loved ones as they once did.

It is also common for survivors to feel anger or frustration as they ponder whether they will ever feel "normal" again. While every survivor's experience is unique, trauma is almost always a life-changing experience that can affect everything from sleeping and eating to concentrating at work.

Understanding the nature and impact of trauma can be key to helping yourself or others who may be affected. Many survivors find themselves in unfamiliar and distressing psychological territory. It is common for them to endure intense feelings of isolation, insecurity, and

fear, and their most treasured relationships often suffer as a result.

Many victims turn to alcohol or other substances in an attempt to get some relief from their emotional turmoil and suffering. All trauma survivors manage their experiences in different ways. However, substance abuse is not only ineffective in healing from trauma, but it also can present a host of additional problems that make the healing process even more difficult.

When the effects of trauma persist, they can lead to mental health concerns such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that can be caused by experiencing or observing virtually



any kind of deep emotional or physical trauma. PTSD is characterized by both emotional and physical suffering; many afflicted by it find themselves unintentionally revisiting their trauma through flashbacks or nightmares. PTSD can make a survivor feel isolated, disconnected, and “different” from other people, and it can even begin to affect the most routine activities of everyday life. Psychologists and counselors with experience in treating trauma survivors can be very helpful in working through PTSD.



**Empower.** Following trauma, victims can feel as though much of what happens in life is beyond their control. Aiding them in maintaining routines can be helpful, as can offering options or possible solutions.



**Be patient.** Every journey through the healing process is unique. Try to understand that it will take time, and do what you can to be supportive. The healing process has no pre-determined timeline.



**Ask.** Your loved one may need help with any number of things or have questions on many different topics. Even a favor as mundane as running a few errands or taking the dog for a walk can be a big help, so consider lending a hand.

## What you can do

Since each individual's experience is unique, there is no one-size-fits-all remedy. Finding ways to be helpful and maintain a healthy relationship with someone affected by trauma can be challenging. The following tips can help:



**Listen.** Talking about the experience, when the survivor is ready, will help acknowledge and validate their experiences and can reduce stress and feelings of isolation. Let them take the lead, and try not to jump in with too many comments or questions right away.



**Research.** If the victim is bewildered by the causes of the event and its aftermath, you can help them find answers and resources.



**Reassure.** As strange as it may sound, those having a hard time with trauma often question whether an incident was their fault or what they could have done to prevent it. They may need to hear that it was not their fault and be assured that they are not alone. Support groups can be a great source of reassurance in such situations.

## We can help



If you or a loved one is struggling to process direct or vicarious trauma, talk to your Employee Assistance Program. We offer confidential counseling and other wellness tools to help in regaining emotional stability.



Live Assistance

Online: [guidanceresources.com](https://guidanceresources.com)

App: GuidanceNow<sup>SM</sup>

Web ID: Enter your company-provided Web ID



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