

Recovering After a Trauma



Have you or someone you know experienced any of the following?

- Sexual assault
- Unexpected or untimely death of a loved one
 - Assault
 - Abuse
- A serious car accident
- A natural disaster or house fire

These are examples of traumatic events. Trauma is defined as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence. It can be directly experienced, witnessed or indirect by hearing about a relative or close friend who has experienced an accidental or violent event. If you have experienced a trauma, you are not alone. Research suggests that most people will experience a trauma at some point in their lives.

Helpful Scripture

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 13:1-5)

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Psalms 34:18)

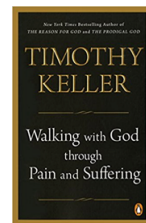
“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Helpful Resources

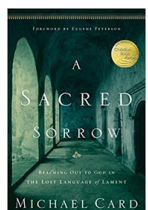
Below are resources written from a Christian perspective about recovering after a trauma or painful event.



Norman Wright
When the Past Won't Let You Go: Find the Healing That Helps You Move On



Timothy Keller
Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering



Michael Card
A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

After experiencing a trauma, it is normal to have upsetting memories, have trouble thinking clearly or sleeping, or feel on edge, sad, afraid, angry or numb. At first it may be hard to engage in normal daily activities. But, most people start to feel better after a few weeks or months. If you don't feel better or are unable to move on from the event for a prolonged period of time, you may be experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There are four types of PTSD symptoms:

- **Reliving the event:** You may feel like you are reliving the event. You might find that you have intrusive memories or thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks
- **Avoiding reminders:** You may try to avoid memories of the event by avoiding people, places or situations related to the event.
- **Negative thoughts and emotions:** You may feel sad, angry or afraid much of the time. You may have memory problems or negative thoughts about yourself or other people. You may feel shame or guilt, or feel like you are disconnected from what is going on around you.
- **Feeling jumpy or on edge:** You may feel on edge and irritable. You may be watchful for future threats and easily startled. It may also be hard for you to fall asleep or concentrate.

If you are experiencing these symptoms after a traumatic event, consult with a doctor or professional counselor to determine if you have PTSD.

Helping a Child After a Trauma

Children and teens can also develop PTSD. However the symptoms may look a little different. Young children may regress (e.g. start wetting the bed again when they were previously toilet-trained), act out the traumatic events during play, or be clingy or afraid to separate from a parent. Adolescents symptoms can appear similar to adults'. They may also develop disruptive, disrespectful or destructive behaviors. Older children and teens may feel guilty for not preventing an injury or death. They may also have thoughts of revenge.

Here are some ways parents and caregivers can support children and youth after a trauma:

- **Let them know they are safe now.** Children and adolescents may need extra assurance.
- **Allow them to talk about the experience and their emotions if they want to.** Let them know that being scared is normal. Allow them to draw how they are feeling if they do not want to talk about it.
- **Go back to their daily routine.** Help them to get adequate sleep, eat meals at regular times, and engage in activities they enjoy.
- **Increase time with friends and family.** Children and adults who spend extra time with friends and family tend to do better after an upsetting event.
- **Take care of your own feelings.** Caregivers are better able to support children and adolescents when they have the support they need.

Recovering After a Trauma

It takes time to recover. The following tips can help you recover and cope after a trauma:

1. **Build in support.** The simple act of talking face-to-face with another person can help you feel more calm and connected. Support can take the form of seeing or interacting with a friend, family, pastors or clergy, meeting with a support group or prayer ministry, or seeking professional support from counselors or psychiatrists.
2. **Recognize triggers.** Triggers are people, places or situations that remind you of the trauma and cause you experience thoughts, feelings or memories associated with the trauma. It is important to identify your triggers so you are able to cope more effectively.
3. **Re-establish a routine.** There is comfort in the familiar. After a trauma, getting back to your normal routine as much as possible will help you minimize stress.
4. **Take care of your body.** Make sure to eat a well-balanced healthy diet, exercise, and get plenty of rest. Self-care can improve your mood and your ability to cope with stress caused by the trauma.
5. **Express feelings.** People who experience a trauma often have a number of difficult emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, shame or helplessness. It is important to acknowledge these emotions and find healthy outlets for them, such as talking to a friend, journaling or exercising.
6. **Challenge feelings of helplessness.** People who have experienced a trauma often feel afraid and helpless. You can challenge these thoughts with truth about who God is and positive action. Because God is in control and present with us in times of trouble, we are never truly helpless. Additionally, positive actions such as volunteering, helping a person in need or small acts of kindness can help you overcome feelings of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness.
7. **Look to God for comfort.** It is important to remember that God comforts and promises to be with us during times of suffering. God has compassion and offers His presence to help people heal and experience peace (e.g. Philippians 4:6-7, Psalm 23:4, Psalm 34:17-18).
8. **Find ways to relax.** When a person experiences a trauma they often feel on edge or jumpy. It is important to find ways to relax your body such as taking a walk outside, taking a warm shower, praying, reading the Bible, exercising, practicing progressive muscle relaxation or deep breathing or singing.