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THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF EXPERTS IN TRAUMATIC STRESS, INC.  
127 ECHO AVENUE, MILLER PLACE, NY 11764  
TEL. (631) 543-2217 • FAX (631) 543-6977  
WWW.ATSM.ORG • WWW.TRAUMATIC-STRESS.ORG • WWW.AAETS.ORG

## Helpful Information During and After a Traumatic Event

Reprinted from *Comprehensive Acute Traumatic Stress Management™*  
by Mark D. Lerner, Ph.D. and Raymond D. Shelton, Ph.D.  
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### **Immediate Traumatic Incident Stress Management:**

- Avoid the use of alcohol and caffeine. Alcohol is a depressant and as such will intensify the negative reactions experienced following the incident. Caffeine will increase anxiety and negatively impact the ability to sleep.
- Drink plenty of fluids such as water or juice. Avoid consuming large quantities of soda that contains caffeine.
- Use quick relaxation techniques to regain control of emotions. Take a slow deep breath by inhaling through the nose, holding the breath for 3 seconds and exhaling through the mouth. Upon exhalation the words “relax,” “let go,” “I can handle this” may be spoken. Repeat the process a second time. Utilize this technique when you become aware of negative reactions or thoughts beginning to occur.
- Become physically comfortable. While the incident may not be under control, you can take back small pieces of control by taking simple action steps. Wash your face, hands, replace wet clothing, and step outside for a breath of fresh air and a change of scene. These simple acts will bring a small level of control to an out of control situation. Repeat them as often as necessary throughout the incident engagement.

### **Stress Management following disengagement from incident:**

- Resist the desire to withdraw and isolate. Maintaining a connection with the people in your life is of the utmost importance. Maintain your support systems of family and friends. If you feel the need for some quiet time, tell those around you of this need. Ask them to give you some “space.” Do not just shut down.

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- Engage in simple exercise. The stress reactions produced by the incident, coupled by the wide range of thoughts, will produce a sense of unrest. Engaging in simple exercise such as walking, biking, and swimming will assist in dissipating these reactions.
- Limit exposure to the news. We live in a media powerful world that allows us to experience events in real time. The constant exposure to the incident through media will continue to trigger negative reactions as the event unfolds over and over. Choose a news program to stay informed. Watch the program in the early evening and allow yourself time to process the information and take appropriate action steps to alleviate the stress reaction that may be created. Do not watch the news immediately prior to going to bed.
- Maintain a normal schedule. Traumatic incidents disrupt the sense of normalcy. By maintaining as normal a schedule as possible you protect some degree of a normal existence while in the midst of the incident. During this time of stress it is important to continue to do things you enjoy. Schedule time for recreational activity. Go ahead and play your golf game—but don't worry about winning, just have fun. Make daily decisions and follow through.
- Set short range goals. Goals provide a sense of direction during a time when confusion and fear of the unknown are present. Attempt to set goals for 1 week, 2 weeks, etc. Be certain that the goal you set is realistic and manageable. By setting realistic goals you will avoid the frustration that always accompanies failed goals.
- Set limits for yourself. Avoid the urge to push on without allowing sufficient time to relax and unwind. Give yourself permission to take the “intermission.” Listen to the “wisdom” of your body. When you are tired... rest.
- Be aware of your feelings and talk about them. Keep a journal and write your thoughts. If you have difficulty sleeping, do not fight the sleeplessness. Find a quiet place and write your way through the sleepless nights. The process of talking or writing will assist you in quieting your mind thus enabling you to relax and sleep.
- During the time period immediately following a traumatic incident realize that those around you are also in varying levels of distress. Be tolerant, seek first to understand others' reactions and allow them space.

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- Resist the desire to make major life changes. Allow time for the incident to pass and recovery to occur before making major decisions.
- Eat well balanced meals.
- Remember your symptoms are normal having experienced a powerful negative event. Understand that during times of great distress "it is OK not to be OK."
- Seek professional assistance if your symptoms persist.

#### **Guidelines for assisting children:**

- Help yourself first. Be certain you are in a good frame of mind when discussing the incident.
- Be honest and open discussing the incident in age appropriate terms.
- Encourage talk about the event.
- Children may not communicate their feelings with words. Encourage them to draw a picture.
- Acknowledge that being frightened is OK.
- Monitor and limit media exposure. Allow time for discussion following exposure to powerful media stimuli.
- Spend extra time at bedtime.
- Remain connected, tune in to their needs.
- Be tolerant during times of distress.
- Hug and cuddle with young children.