

DEALING WITH A CRISIS

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What is a crisis?

We use this word to describe a situation which feels seriously stressful, painful and overwhelming for us. This could be something affecting a number of people, e.g. road traffic accident, fire etc or something more personal such as a serious illness, the loss of a loved one, home or way of life.

Sometimes a crisis cannot be explained in terms of a serious incident but seems to be triggered by something quite minor. Often such an incident can be traced back to a series of previous incidents or situations. It is important to remember that for each of us experiences of crisis are personal and we may well all react differently to the same situation.

How do people respond to crisis?

Again, responses to crisis are personal but may include several of the following which can seem to overwhelm you:

- Heightened anxiety and depression
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Inability to cope with everyday activities, e.g. managing the home, looking after the children, going out or to work
- Eating problems
- A sense of "floating unreality"
- Feeling tired and/ or suffering unusual aches and pains
- Pre-occupation with the problem or avoidance of it

- Lack of concentration and difficulty in thinking clearly
- Flashbacks to a traumatic incident
- Changes in behaviour
- Panic attacks
- Feelings of anger, shame or guilt

Perhaps what is most concerning is that you feel unable to manage your life at the most basic level or even to feel that you want to manage your life.

What can be done to help?

The way you deal with things may be to suppress feelings which are too painful and distressing. People often describe being numb, exhausted and unable to think or do anything properly.

You may distract yourself by being extremely busy or exercising until you seem to drop with exhaustion. It may be watching television mindlessly or going out visiting friends just to be out of the house. Both these coping strategies of suppression and distraction may help you to survive the very early frightening stages of feeling that you are "going mad" or "losing touch with reality". More positively, you may try:

- to accept that your feelings are normal and can be expected under these Circumstances
- to keep telling yourself that things WILL get better
- to make use of other people in managing your responsibilities, or



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In sharing your anxiety if that helps to maintain some sort of structure in your life. This may be getting up at a regular time, trying to go out, trying to eat at regular times and making use of some of the distractions of exercise, visiting friends etc

All of this may feel forced and unreal but it may also help to keep you in touch with everyday things.

Finally, it may be, at this time, that you will be advised or wish to consult your doctor. Perhaps the question of whether or not to take medication will arise. You will be able to discuss this with your doctor and you may wish to inform yourself about the advantages and disadvantages of taking this course of action. Your doctor may advise you about sleeping patterns.

The next steps

In the early time after a difficult crisis you will probably feel too distressed to think about your next actions but gradually you will realise that some of the coping strategies can only work in the short term.

For example suppressing your emotions will only work in the short term and will come back when you least expect them. Other people can help by listening and supporting you, allowing you to “let off steam”, help you sort out your ideas or find a way to accept your new circumstances.

It is helpful to talk when you may experience

“flashbacks” after a dangerous or distressing incident. As you talk about the incident in more detail, the “flashbacks” can become less frequent and frightening.

As you feel more ready to take control so you can take some very specific steps:

- Remind yourself that you are normal and don't be too hard on yourself.
- Begin to be pro-active
- Draw up a list of qualities you need to face this situation (e.g. humour, courage, imagination etc) and remember times when you found you had those qualities.
- Try to believe that you have the power to move on and begin to plan
- Ask for help
- Consider some changes in life-style which may be helpful to you: balanced diet, exercise or activities such gardening, relaxation, reduce alcohol

Where to get further help

Many people find it helpful and reassuring to share their fears and their coping strategies with somebody else. This person may be a member of the family or a close friend. Sometimes it is also helpful to talk with somebody outside the family and your immediate friends.

Counselling is available via your GP or through the Trust on **0151 330 8103**

www.merseycarewellbeingatwork.co.uk/staff-support-services