

## TRAUMA

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People react in different ways to trauma, experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to think, feel or respond, so don't judge your own reactions or those of other people.

Emotional and psychological symptoms of trauma:

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Feeling disconnected or numb

Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

Symptoms typically last from a few days to a few months, gradually fading as you process the trauma. But even when you're feeling better, you may be troubled from time to time by painful memories or emotions—especially in response to triggers such as an anniversary of the event or something that reminds you of the trauma.

Whether or not a traumatic event involves death, survivors must cope with the loss, at least temporarily, of their sense of safety. The natural reaction to this loss is grief. Like people who have lost a loved one, trauma survivors go through a **grieving process**, which is easier if you can turn to others for support and take care of yourself.

### **TRAUMA RECOVERY STRATEGY 1: TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

**Try to get enough sleep.** After a traumatic experience, worry or fear may disturb your sleep patterns. A lack of sleep can make your trauma symptoms worse and make it harder to maintain your emotional balance. Limit alcohol and drugs as their use can worsen your trauma symptoms and exacerbate feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation.

Eat a well-balanced diet. Eating small, well-balanced meals throughout the day will help you keep your energy up and minimize mood swings. Avoid sugary and fried foods; omega-3 fats such as salmon, walnuts, soybeans, and flaxseeds—will give your mood a boost.

Try **relaxation techniques** such as meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises. Schedule time for activities that bring your joy such as favorite hobbies.

**Try to be kind to yourself! Do things for yourself as well as others.**

### **TRAUMA RECOVERY STRATEGY 2: GET MOVING**

Trauma disrupts the body's natural equilibrium, freezing you in a state of hyperarousal and fear. In essence, your nervous system gets "stuck." As well as burning off adrenaline and releasing endorphins, exercise and movement can actually help your nervous system become unstuck.

### **TRAUMA RECOVERY STRATEGY 3: DON'T ISOLATE**

Following a trauma, you may want to withdraw from others, but isolation makes things worse. Connecting with others face to face will help you heal, so make an effort to maintain your relationships and avoid spending too much time alone.

### **TRAUMA RECOVERY STRATEGY 4: SELF-REGULATE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM**

No matter how agitated, anxious, or out of control you feel, it's important to know that you can change your arousal system and calm yourself.

- **MINDFUL BREATHING.** If you are feeling disoriented, confused, or upset, a quick way to calm yourself is through mindful breathing. Simply take 60 breaths, focusing your attention on each out breath.
- **SENSORY INPUT.** Does a specific sight, smell, or taste quickly make you feel calm? Or maybe petting an animal or listening to music works to quickly soothe you? Everyone responds to sensory input a little differently, so experiment to find what works best for you.
- **STAYING GROUNDED.** To feel in the present and more grounded sit on a chair, feel your feet on the ground and your back against the chair. Look around you and pick six objects that have red or blue in them. Notice how your breathing gets deeper and calmer.
- **ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL WHAT YOU FEEL WHEN YOU FEEL IT.** Acknowledge your feelings about the trauma as they arise and accept them.

Recovering from a traumatic event takes time, and everyone heals at his or her own pace. But if months have passed and your symptoms aren't letting up, get help.

### **SEEK HELP FOR EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IF YOU'RE:**

- Having trouble functioning at home or work
- Suffering from severe fear, anxiety or depression
- Unable to form close, satisfying relationships
- Experiencing terrifying memories, nightmares, or flashbacks
- Avoiding more and more things that remind you of the trauma
- Emotionally numb and disconnected from others
- Using alcohol or drugs to feel better

\*Recommendations are just our thoughts of a starting place to look into. It is our assumption that parents/families do their own due diligence when choosing a provider and Seattle Parents of Preemies and its associates are in no way responsible for any outcomes or negative experiences with any of the resources mentioned here or elsewhere.