

Effects of trauma

Trauma experienced in a natural disaster can vary enormously from person to person depending on past experiences and the degree of resilience that each person has. In the initial period following a disaster, a person can be in shock and feel numb. This is the body's natural response to a major trauma.

Initially we tend to fill our time with 'busyness' and practicalities such as where to sleep, our ongoing employment, income, care of animals and generally meeting basic needs. This physical recovery is important as the body's coping mechanisms help us focus on all these external practicalities and attend to our basic needs.

Sometimes it is easier to feel like you are doing something practical rather than focus on your feelings in the situation. Most of us galvanise ourselves to cope and put off the emotional aspects for a later time. This is a natural reaction in the early recovery stages after the disaster.

However for some people this can be a habit well after the immediate physical recovery has finished. We can fill up our life with so much 'busyness' that we never revisit or discharge the feelings around the trauma.

This can then begin to show in less healthy ways, sometimes months or even years after the trauma or disaster has occurred.

Some symptoms can include, numbing oneself with drugs, busyness or alcohol; flight or fight behaviours (extreme reactions); overwhelm (freeze) and sleeplessness, irritability, intolerance and or impatience.

Sometimes it can be weeks, months or years later that we are able to revisit the emotions around the trauma. And sometimes we need the assistance of a Counsellor if we continue to feel overwhelmed, depressed, isolated or disheartened.

With the help of on the ground Counsellors we are able to enable communities to increase their wisdom, strength, personal resilience and their ability to have compassion for themselves and others in the future.

Helpful tips

We encourage those who are affected by natural disasters to:

- Share your feelings when you are ready
- Try to keep the rest of your life as normal as possible
- Accept support of people who care
- Take the time to be with your close family and friends
- Express your needs clearly and honestly to family, friends and those in helping professions.
- Look after yourself – eat well, sleep and take time out
- Let your children talk to you and others about their emotions
- Call Lifeline if necessary – a Lifeline Telephone Crisis Supporter is available 24 hours a day – 13 11 14