

Helpful Strategies For Trauma Victims/Survivors *From Trauma Debriefing Handbook*

- It is very important to your recovery to get enough rest, especially the first 4 - 6 weeks following the trauma.
 - If you cannot sleep at night, take “cat” naps of 15 minutes - 1/2 hour during the day.
 - If waking up during the night because of traumatic dreams know they will pass in time. Do what comforts you. Read a good book until you become sleepy again. Snack, watch television, listen to music, write, do some housework. Remember, this will be a temporary change.
- Exercise of some kind is important to help relieve you of the tension that traumatic experiences create. Even if you have not been exercising, go for a short walk. Walk the dog an extra time. Do housework or add a few minutes to your usual exercise routine.
- Avoid too much caffeine, alcohol, as they can stimulate your already over aroused brain or can intensify your emotions. Do not self medicate. NOTE: If you are having difficulties with relaxing or sleeping following the trauma, then call for a temporary prescription to help you sleep but if this persists beyond 4-6 weeks consult with a trauma specialist immediately.
- • Pull back on making a commitment to additional responsibilities for the first four weeks. The tendency for some is to take on additional responsibilities thinking it will help them forget. In reality, it frequently drains them of energy, delays the healing process and intensifies future reactions when they finally emerge.
- Be protective and nurturing of yourself. It’s okay to want to be by yourself, or just stay around home with the family. Eat whatever your comfort foods are, as frequently as you need. Let family, friends know that they can best help by taking care of themselves over the next several days while you do what helps you feel a bit better.
- During the 4 - 6 weeks following the event expect that new memories of, and reactions to your experience are likely to emerge. This does not mean things are getting worse. It takes time to heal.
- Understand that your trauma reactions need to be expressed and experienced by you in order for you to heal. Kids, for example, go to the same horror movie, like *Nightmare On Elm Street*, four, five, six times, so they can master their fear, the terror they experience when seeing the movie for the first time.

- If any trauma reaction continues beyond six to eight weeks from when the trauma occurred, you really do need to talk with a trauma consultant. If you do not, such reactions can become chronic as well as create additional problems for you.
- We all have different reactions. What scares you may not scare someone else. If you are experiencing reactions after the six-week period, it does not mean something is terribly wrong with you. It means your past experiences are such that you just don't know how to respond to what happened. Generally, talking to a trauma specialist a few times will resolve the problem.
- A traumatic experience can, however, terrorize the strongest and healthiest. It can induce such terror that our lives become disorganized or disoriented. We become someone strange or act in ways we have never acted before. This can panic us.
- Trauma is not an experience we want to keep to ourselves. It is, in fact, an experience we want to resolve as quickly as possible. Do not hesitate to consult with a trauma specialist when your reactions are overwhelming or interfere with normal functioning. The specialist can help you sort out which reactions are normal and can help you prepare for possible future reactions.
- Finally, traumatic experiences tend to change the way we look at life, our behaviors, activities, relationships and our future. Expect in the weeks to come to see the world differently, your friends, loved ones, work relationships. In time, you will redefine what you want for yourself.
- The first 4 - 6 weeks therefore is not a time to be making any major decisions. Put what you can on hold. During recovery from a trauma everything is a bit distorted. You want to wait whenever possible to deal with major decisions until after you have had time (4 - 6 weeks) to reorder your life and feel stable once again.
- Should you need further assistance call The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC) at (877) 306-5256.