



Responding to Stressful Events: For Adults

Experiencing **stressful events** can make it more challenging to feel safe, in control, and alert. It can impact your ability to move forward, and you may continue to feel strong emotions afterwards. Here are some examples of what you may experience:

- Shock, or disbelief, and having a hard time understanding what happened
- Feeling anxious, scared, sad and hopeless
- Feeling guilty (as a survivor), ashamed or relieved that the stressful event is over
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Physical side effects, such as headaches, dizziness, shaking, unexplained body aches and pains
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns

Remember, everyone responds to stress differently.

What you can do

It is important to listen to your body and not ignore the feelings and emotions you are having. It may feel easier to not talk about a stressful event in hopes that the feelings will go away on their own, but doing so may delay healing and cause feelings to linger. Below are examples of what you can do to help you get through stressful times:

- Focus on activities that you enjoy such as reading, nature walks and spending time with loved ones
- Get back into a routine. After a stressful event, you may find it difficult to get your life back on track. Creating a new routine, which includes making time for healthy coping strategies, is a great way to re-establish healthy ways of coping
- **Take a break** from watching media or online videos about stressful events. It's okay to want to keep updated on events, but try other ways such as reading or listening to news
- Allow yourself to heal. Deal with painful emotions by making time to mourn and be patient with yourself
- Set realistic goals on your journey to recovery. Remind yourself that goals are different for everyone, that strong feelings can resurface, and that it is okay to feel the way you feel
- Connect with others who have also experienced a stressful event or attend available support sessions in the community
- Get your body moving. It may be the last thing you want to do, but being physically active can boost your mood and give you positive energy. Consider simple activities such as going outside for a short walk. Start slow so you do not feel overwhelmed
- **Stay connected** with friends, family, and support groups to improve your mental health. Talking to others and doing "normal" things can help take your mind off the stressful event
- Make **self-care** a priority. Identify ways or set a time for activities you can do to improve your mental health and plan to follow through. For example, **practicing mindfulness** is great to help you re-connect and re-center yourself

Seek help:

- If you begin to have disturbing thoughts that do not go away, thoughts of harming yourself or others, and/or thoughts of suicide
- If you continue to have strong feelings that persist and or interfere with day-to-day life
- If you simply would like support or believe you would benefit from the help of a professional

It's important to ask for support when facing difficult situations. Some of the support available to you include:

- **Immediate crisis support** is available from the [Distress Centre Ottawa](#) and Region 24/7 - 613-238-3311 (Bilingual) or [Tel-Aide Outaouais](#). For children and youth ages 18 and under, please **call Youth Services Bureau's** 24/7 Crisis Line at 613-260-2360 or 1-877-377-7775 (toll free for Eastern Ontario)
- [AccessMHA](#) helps anyone over the age of 16 to find support for mental health and substance use.
- Go to [1Call1Click.ca](#) to access support for anyone under 21 years of age. or you can also call 613-260-2360 or 1-877-377-7775 (toll free for Eastern Ontario)
- [Counselling Connect](#) provides quick access to a free phone or video counselling session.
- The [Walk-In Counselling](#) clinic offers free counselling support without an appointment in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Somali, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Call 613-755-2277 for locations and availability

For more support and information visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/MentalHealthandWellness