

21 THINGS YOU CAN DO WHILE YOU'RE LIVING THROUGH A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

1. Take appropriate action to ensure your physical safety and the safety of others. When necessary and practical, remove yourself from the event scene to avoid over-exposure to the situation.
2. Address your medical needs (e.g., If you're having difficulty breathing, experiencing chest pains or palpitations, seek immediate medical attention).
3. Attend to your needs – water, food and sanitation.
4. Become aware of how the event is affecting you (i.e., your feelings, thoughts, actions, and your physical and spiritual reactions)
5. Know that your reactions are normal responses to an abnormal event. You are not "losing it" or "going crazy."
6. Speak with your support people, physician or healthcare provider and make them aware of what has happened to you.
7. Be aware of how you're holding up when there are children around you. Children will take their cues from the adults around them.
8. Keep up to date with gaining information. Knowing the facts about what has happened will help you to keep functioning.
9. When possible, surround yourself with family and loved ones. Realise that the event is likely affecting them, too.
10. Tell your story. And, allow yourself to feel. It's okay to feel a range of scary emotions during a traumatic experience.
11. You may experience a desire to withdraw and isolate, causing a strain on significant others. Resist the urge to shut down and retreat into your own world.
12. Traumatic stress may compromise your ability to think clearly. If you find it difficult to concentrate when someone is speaking to you, focus on the specific words they are saying – work to actively listen. Slow down the conversation and try repeating what you have just heard.

13. Don't make important decisions when you're feeling overwhelmed. Allow trusted family members or friends to assist you with necessary decision-making.
14. If stress is causing you to react physically, use controlled breathing techniques to stabilise yourself. Take a slow deep breath by inhaling through your nose, hold your breath for five seconds and then exhale through your mouth. Upon exhalation, think the words "relax," "let go," or "I'm handling this." Repeat this process several times.
15. Realise that repetitive thinking and sleep difficulties are normal reactions. Don't fight the sleep difficulty. Try the following: eliminate caffeine for four hours prior to your bedtime, create the best sleep environment you can, consider taking a few moments before turning out the lights to write down your thoughts; thus emptying your mind.
16. Give yourself permission to rest, relax and engage in non-threatening activity. Read, listen to music, consider taking a warm bath, etc.
17. Physical exercise may help to dissipate the stress energy that has been generated by your experience. Take a walk, ride a bike, or swim.
18. Create a journal. Writing about your experience may help to expose yourself to painful thoughts and feelings and, ultimately, enable you to assimilate your experience.
19. If you find that your experience is too powerful, allow yourself the advantage of professional and/or spiritual guidance, support and education.
20. Try to maintain your schedule. Traumatic events will disrupt the sense of normalcy. We are all creatures of habit. By maintaining our routines, we can maintain a sense of control at a time when circumstances may lead us to feel a loss of control.
21. Crises present opportunities. Cultivate a mission and purpose. Seize the energy from your experience and use it to propel you to set realistic goals, make decisions and take action.

Adapted from an article written by Dr Mark Lerner (2015)