

# Effective Ways of Coping After a Traumatic Event

1. Accept the fact you have been a victim and accept the feelings that result. **Remember:** others may not validate your feeling. In fact, they may minimize your experience: "you were only a witness" or "you were really lucky" or "its been two weeks - why are you still bothered".
2. Accept **all** of the feelings you are having as normal reactions to an extraordinary event. You are not "crazy." You are reacting normally to a "crazy" event. Be **patient** with yourself. It takes time to recover emotionally from a traumatic event.
3. Combat any guilt you might have by:
  - accepting it as normal.
  - talking to others about your role and their role during the event. You are probably not alone in your reaction to this event.
  - realizing you were a victim yourself and not a trained rescuer.
  - recognizing what you "did right."
  - recognizing the extenuating circumstances related to the event—the suddenness, the dangerousness, etc.
4. **Don't revert to "bad habits"** (alcohol, drugs, overeating) to cope. They will only make matters worse.
5. **Maintain Normalcy.** Go about your daily routines and "take care of business".
6. Attempt to understand "What happened" by getting the facts.
7. **Ventilate:** talk about the event and write about it.
8. **Thank** those who helped you, and apologize to those you hurt during and since the tragic event.
9. **Help Each Other**
  - Reach out to support those who are particularly traumatized (See Emotional First Aid Skills)
  - Respect each others way of coping. Don't victimize each other by judging each others individual coping style. Let the "grievers" grieve and allow the "doers" to do.

10. **Decide As A Group How You Want To Help:**

- the victim
- the family
- each other

11. **If Death Has Occurred:** Implement or participate in a "Saying Goodbye" ritual

- attend services
- contribute to a memorial fund
- establish a memorial on scene
- wear a symbol on clothing

12. Maintain a "continuing relationship" with the victim. It is quite normal and helpful to **reminisce** about the victim and to find ways of "keeping his memory alive."

13. Deal with **Bad memories** by expanding your "memory tape" to include good memories.

- when bad memories of the event occur, immediately replace that memory with a memory of the entire day.
- include good memories of the victim in your memory tape.

14. Allow your experience of this tragic event make you a better person.

- identify what this tragedy has taught you.
- incorporate what you have learned/realized into your "new life."