



## **EFFECTIVE WAYS OF COPING AFTER A TRAUMATIC EVENT**

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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 "it's 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 other's way of coping. Don't victimize each other by judging each other's 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."