

Witnessing road trauma



If you were a passenger, witness or you assisted at the scene of a serious road trauma, it is important to acknowledge you have been through a traumatic event and may be experiencing a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions. This fact sheet contains some information that may be of help to you.

Common reactions for witnesses to road trauma

In the days and weeks following your encounter with a road trauma, you might experience some of the following reactions:

- Repeated (unwanted) memories of the trauma scene, sleep difficulties, anxiety, confusion, guilt, feelings of helplessness, anger, disbelief, irritability, wanting to withdraw from others, avoiding reminders of the crash (e.g. avoiding the crash site), shaking, short attention span, or lack of concentration;
- Preoccupation with what happened at the crash site, what you heard and saw, and the events following the crash;
- Feeling that your sense of safety has been shattered and nothing is 'safe' anymore;
- Fear of driving, fear for loved ones when they are driving, or fear of being a passenger in a motor vehicle;
- Questioning yourself and wondering whether you could have done something, or done more, to help those injured or killed in the crash. You may wonder whether you made the right decisions at the scene or why you survived and others didn't;
- If you were first on scene, you may have tried to help a person in their last moments. You may feel that you have a bond with that person, even though you didn't

know them before the crash. You may be grieving for those who have died or for their family and friends; or

- Feeling that your thoughts and feelings are not understood by others and being expected to 'get over it' because you did not know those who died. This may cause you to avoid talking about the crash and what you heard, saw or even smelled, which can lead to greater feelings of isolation.

These are all normal and natural reactions to what you have experienced and are to be expected at this difficult time.

What can help?

- Recognise that you have been through a traumatic event;
- Give yourself permission, time and space to come to terms with what you have been through;
- Try not to isolate yourself from other people. Seek out someone who understands what you're experiencing and who will listen and not judge you;
- Recurring flashbacks, dreams and thoughts about the trauma are normal. Don't try to fight them, they will decrease in frequency as time passes;
- Find someone who is a good listener and talk about what you are thinking and feeling;
- Get plenty of rest;
- Eat regular, well-balanced meals;

- Exercise regularly;
- Try not to use alcohol or drugs to numb any pain;
- Reduce your use of stimulants such as coffee, tea, cola and cigarettes;
- Take time out to relax;
- Try to resume a normal routine as soon as possible; and
- Ask for help when it's needed.

Seeking help

The majority of people deal with traumatic experiences without professional help. They rely on supportive family and friends to help them feel calm and safe again. Sometimes reactions to trauma can be unexpected, overwhelming and prolonged. If you are worried or concerned about how you are coping, it's best to seek assistance from your general practitioner, a psychologist, or counsellor experienced in trauma and grief.

Further support services

Lifeline 13 11 14

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (ages 5-25)

Crisis Care 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008 (free call)

GriefLine 1300 845 745

Rural Link 1800 552 002

Phoenix Australia (Centre for Post Traumatic Mental Health) – information about recovery from trauma
www.phoenixaustralia.org

Australian Psychological Society

www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/trauma

About us

Road Trauma Support WA is a state-wide service assisting anyone affected by road trauma, regardless of when the incident occurred or what level of involvement (direct or indirect) the person had.

FREE counselling sessions are available.

Our dedicated team of counsellors provide a non-judgemental, confidential, free counselling and support service. Counselling is provided face-to-face, via telephone or by video call for anyone affected by road trauma in Western Australia regardless of when the crash occurred or your level of involvement, direct or indirect. Please contact us directly if you would like to book an appointment.

No referral is required.

We provide:

- Information and support;
- Education and training (costs may apply); and
- Counselling.

We are committed to being respectful of cultural and family values and provide our service in a safe, non-judgemental environment.

Road Trauma Support WA is delivered by Injury Matters with funding from the Road Trauma Trust Account and contract management through the Road Safety Commission.



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