



ABOUT TRAUMA

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People may experience circumstances so distressing that normal coping skills are not adequate. Such incidents might include abandonment, abuse, war, environmental disaster, an untimely death, severe illness, and many others. Research suggests that:

- An estimated 70 percent of adults in the United States have experienced a traumatic event at least once in their lives, and up to 20 percent of these people later develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹

An estimated 5 percent of Americans—more than 13 million people—have PTSD at any given time.²

While no one is excluded from the trials and sufferings of this life, people may believe if they are strong enough or faithful enough, they should be able to move on with their lives after a traumatic event. Most people who experience trauma are able to return to leading a normal life, but they typically go through an adjustment period first.

Symptoms of Trauma

The stress caused by trauma can affect all aspects of a person's life, including mental, emotional, and physical well-being.³ It is important to tell your doctor of any traumatic events you or your loved ones may have experienced. The following may be symptoms of trauma:⁴

Mental/Emotional

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares or frightening thoughts, especially during exposure to events or objects reminiscent of the trauma
- Emotional numbness
- Sleep disturbances
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Intense guilt
- Hypervigilance—being too watchful or unnecessarily fearful
- Clinginess
- Withdrawal
- Avoidance of reminders of the ordeal

Physical

- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Immune system problems
- Dizziness
- Chest pain
- Discomfort in other parts of the body

Helps

Family members are often the first to notice these indicators. Here are some ways they can help:

Spend extra time together. Gathering as a family away from the demands of work, school, and other responsibilities communicates love, commitment, and priority. Simple things such as smiles and hugs give assurance and are helpful when breaking through a sense of isolation.

Strengthen and renew spiritual foundations.

Encourage personal prayer, and gather in family prayer often. Priesthood blessings can also be tremendously beneficial; during high stress times it is often easier to “hear” than to “feel” the word of the Lord. Keep a journal. Listen to music that invites the Spirit. Attend church and the temple.

Reframe the experience. In other words, approach the situation from a different angle and gain a new perspective (see Isaiah 61:1–3; D&C 98:1–3).

Be patient and gentle. Encourage, but do not rush, the healing process.

Use good judgment when seeking professional help. LDS Family Services and other professional resources may help you or your loved one successfully work through the experience to a higher level of functioning. Turning the traumatic experience into a growth experience could be a primary goal of professional intervention. ■

NOTES

1. Posttraumatic stress disorder is a professional diagnosis identifying both physical and emotional symptoms that occur in response to a traumatic event.
2. See PTSD Alliance, “Hope for Recovery: Understanding Posttraumatic Stress Disorder” (2001) 5, available at www.sidran.org/pdf/Hope_for_Recovery.pdf. The PTSD Alliance is made up of the Sidran Institute, the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.
3. See PTSD Alliance, “Hope for Recovery,” 5.
4. See National Institute of Mental Health, “Reliving Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Oct. 2001, 1 (NIH publication no. 01-4597), available at www.anxietyzone.com/NIMHreliving.pdf.