



Healthcare Weekly Review

Traumatic events are felt, interpreted and responded to differently by everyone. Our bodies are responding to an abnormal event, and reactions may occur immediately following a trauma, a few days after, or sometimes, not for weeks or months.

In fact, a new Harris Poll, out today, in advance of the 10-year anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, finds that almost half of the people who experienced physical or psychological problems in the months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks still struggle with feelings of fear and anxiety. Topping the list are reports of “worry about family and friends” and “loss of hope about the future.”

“A person who is emotionally very healthy is going to take the trauma and use it as a springboard to get better or for improvement,” says Howard Belkin, M.D., a Beaumont Hospital psychiatrist. “But it takes time. When a trauma is experienced, the first thing people feel is denial and shock.”

These reactions are natural and people usually feel overwhelmed for some time after a traumatic event, but if the feelings and symptoms don't improve, professional help might be necessary.



“The more severe the trauma, the greater the chance that it's going to have a significant impact on the person's life,” says Dr. Belkin.

After experiencing a traumatic event, it's typical to mentally replay events over and over or feel confused and unable to focus, but it's also common to have physical, emotional and behavioral reactions too. Headaches, stomach aches, fatigue and muscle aches are all physical reactions that are expected. You may feel angry or irritable, numb, sad, anxious, guilty, overwhelmed or fearful and unmotivated. This can also lead to withdrawal from others, unusual or uncontrollable behavior, restlessness, difficulty with normal activities or increased urges for drugs and alcohol.

“If a person finds themselves drinking more alcohol or using drugs after a traumatic event, that's a red flag that it's time to seek treatment,” says Dr. Belkin. “That type of behavior can escalate and become detrimental to a person's health.”

If therapy is needed and not received or done appropriately, the symptoms can increase and continue to affect people, so it's important to recognize when to seek treatment.

Feelings about traumatic events should be discussed with family members. Talking about how you feel after a traumatic event can reduce the intensity of the trauma, allow the brain to process and clear information, calm the mind, fuel the recovery process and also help you feel more in control and back to normal.

As a loved one of someone who has experienced a traumatic event, make sure you are sensitive to and respectful of the need for space or personal time. Offer your assistance and be available even when you haven't been specifically asked, but avoid forcing someone to talk about it.

If after a few weeks someone is not getting better, or starts to experience depression or bad thoughts, ask your family physician for a referral to a psychiatrist in your area who can assess the person's condition and identify treatment necessary to get back to normal.