

Are you going through trauma?

This list covers most of the normal reactions to trauma, and it might help you understand what is happening to you. You might have reactions like these after a single event—but people also have reactions like these when they are experiencing a long-term trauma such as physical or sexual abuse. If you or someone you know is experiencing a long-term trauma like this, you should get help immediately by talking with someone you trust.

Reactions to trauma include:

- Being unable to sleep
- Having nightmares
- Not feeling hungry
- Feeling self-conscious or ashamed
- Feeling nervous
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling like you want to behave in risky ways
- Feeling angry and wanting revenge
- Feeling jumpy or paranoid
- Not wanting to listen to your parents or teachers
- Getting easily annoyed
- Feeling like a loner and not wanting to be around anybody
- Having “flashbacks” where you see the trauma again in your mind
- Not paying attention in class and getting bad grades
- Not wanting to do the things that you used to like doing

TRAUMA

For
Teens

BOSTON
PUBLIC
HEALTH
COMMISSION



What if you don't feel better?

If you are having a hard time coping with trauma, you should talk with a doctor or counselor—or even your parents—to let them know what's going on. Consider asking for help if:

- You don't feel better after a week
- You feel completely numb
- You can't stand to go near the place where the trauma occurred
- You start carrying a weapon to feel safe
- You start using drugs and/or alcohol to feel better or to forget what happened
- You feel hopeless

Remember—you are not alone, and other people want to help.

For additional health resources, referrals, and information on health insurance, call the Mayor's Health Line at (617) 534-5050.

In case of a health emergency, call the BEST Team at (800) 981-HELP or call 911.

For information online, go to www.talklisten.org

Boston Public Health Commission
1010 Massachusetts Ave
Boston, MA 02118
www.bphc.org

Design by Boston Public Health Commission Communications Department.

Thanks to the youth from the Boston Public Health Commission's Adolescent Wellness Program & Boston Area Health Education Center's Youth Advisory Board (BAHEC YAB).

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Dealing with Trauma.

How to cope when bad things happen to you, your family and your community.



HEALING

What is trauma?

We all go through tough times in our lives, like a car accident or trouble at school. These events can make us upset and sad—and they may cause stress. Stress is the tension you feel about the typical events in your life. Most people get stressed out every now and then.

But some people go through an event that is seriously scary or violent—not an everyday event. For example, you may have been physically injured, physically, mentally or sexually abused, kidnapped, or trapped in some kind of natural disaster—or you might have seen one of these things happen to someone else.

If you have experienced or witnessed a terrible event like this (often called a trauma or a traumatic event), you might be suffering from trauma. Trauma is the emotional shock that follows a severely painful, horrifying, or overwhelming experience.

What's so important about trauma?

Unlike stress, trauma can really mess up your life. Your mood can spiral downward until you feel so awful that you don't think you will recover. You might feel paranoid or incredibly angry. You might also feel very alone—like you have nowhere to turn.

Many of these feelings happen because a traumatic event can make your body release chemicals called hormones which will make you feel strange, uncomfortable, and over-emotional. The things that usually stress you out a little might really put you over the edge. You might feel like a different person. As a result, you might start doing poorly in school, losing friends, or taking big risks.

It's totally normal to feel different after a trauma, but it's very important to try and help yourself feel better.

What are some normal reactions to trauma?

It is normal to have strange and/or strong emotions—fear, anger, unhappiness, or even excitement. You might also have trouble sleeping or trouble paying attention in school. You may even get frustrated with yourself for not feeling better. The feelings are different for each person, but they are all natural results of trauma.

What can you do to feel better?

You might be surprised to find that you can reduce the effects of trauma by doing some of the things that can also reduce everyday stress. These things might seem obvious—but they work. When you are dealing with trauma, it is important to try these things, even if they seem simple.

Here are some ideas that have helped other people feel better:

- **Take it seriously.** Don't just hold everything inside and avoid dealing with it, because the strange feelings probably won't go away. If you pretend nothing happened, you'll just feel worse.
- **Take care of yourself.** Eat right, drink lots of water, and get lots of sleep. Try to avoid caffeine and junk food. Exercise can really help, like going for a walk or riding your bike or shooting some hoops. Being active helps get rid of stress.
- **Hang out with family and friends.** Sometimes the best place to go is home to the people who love you. They can comfort you—and they can help you feel safe.
- **Talk it out.** Don't force yourself to talk about the trauma if you're not ready—but if you do feel like talking, sit down with someone you trust, like a parent, a teacher, or a spiritual advisor.

- **Keep your head clear.** Alcohol and drugs are never a good idea but especially not when you're already on edge. Some people want to forget or avoid bad feelings, but alcohol and drugs can make you do things you wouldn't normally do. It will make things worse, not better.
- **Keep it real.** If you can, try doing normal things. Go out with your friends, do your homework, practice with the team. Even though you might not want to, sticking to your usual routine will help you feel more like yourself again.
- **Chill out.** Believe it or not, a good way to cope with anything is to take some deep breaths and find some ways to relax. Writing in a journal, sketching, or listening to music might help.
- **Give it time.** Getting through trauma takes time—sometimes weeks or even months. It is important to be patient, but be sure to ask for help if you feel like things are getting worse.

Remember: You are not alone!