

# REMAINING RESILIENT AFTER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

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## A post incident guide for you, your family and friends



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HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA

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### A post incident guide for you, your family and friends

Seafarers and others in the maritime industry may face the effects of trauma if caught up in an incident as well as the trauma faced by the perceived threat of becoming involved in an incident.

Traumatic events are ones which have the potential to interfere with your ability to function correctly and while most people recover well from such events, it would not be unusual if after an incident, you are now experiencing, or later experience, some strong emotional or physical reactions. Don't forget it is very common and quite normal for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have experienced a traumatic event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event; however sometimes it may take time (days or even weeks) for them to emerge. While not everyone will notice their own distress, it is not uncommon for people who know them well (such as family, colleagues or friends) to recognise that they "behave differently".

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last days, weeks, months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and support from your colleagues and your family and friends, stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, however, professional help may be necessary and your organisation can give you the guidance you need to get the right help.

Needing professional help does not imply instability or weakness. In fact getting help is a sign that you are taking your health seriously. Keeping yourself mentally healthy is as important as keeping yourself physically healthy.



## COMMON STRESS-RELATED SYMPTOMS

Here are some very common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

### PHYSICAL

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Muscle tremors
- Twitches
- Chest pains\*\*
- Difficulty breathing\*\*
- Increased blood pressure
- Rapid heart rate\*\*
- Thirst
- Headaches\*\*
- Visual difficulties\*\*
- Vomiting
- Grinding Teeth
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Chills
- Shock\*\*
- Fainting\*\*

### EMOTIONAL

- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Grief
- Denial
- Severe panic (rare)
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Intense anger
- Irritability
- Being extra vigilant
- Flashbacks

\*\* These symptoms may indicate a need for medical evaluation by a General Practitioner



## COMMON STRESS-RELATED SYMPTOMS

Here are some very common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

### THOUGHTS

- Blaming someone
- Confusion
- Poor attention
- Poor decisions
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Memory problems
- Difficulty identifying familiar things or people
- Poor problem solving
- Loss of person, place or time orientation
- Disturbed thinking
- Nightmares

### BEHAVIOURAL

- Change in activity
- Change in speech
- Withdrawal
- Emotional outbursts
- Suspiciousness
- Poor communication
- Increased alcohol intake
- Inability to rest
- Antisocial acts
- Intensified startle reflex
- Pacing
- Erratic movements
- Agitation
- Apprehension

\*\* These symptoms may indicate a need for medical evaluation by a General Practitioner



## SOME HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOU

- Spend time with friends, family and people you trust
- Re-occurring thoughts, dreams and flashbacks are normal at first – don't try to fight them, they will decrease over time and become less problematic
- Maintain/re-establish as normal a routine as possible
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel like it)
- Try to keep a reasonable level of activity (exercise is good for your mental health)
- Fight against boredom
- Express your feelings as they arise to people that you trust
- But remember, you don't have to tell everyone everything

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES

Listen carefully, don't try and solve every issue which emerges. Just listening helps

- Spend time with the person
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help. Reassure them but do not force them to talk
- Help them with every day or routine tasks – it may take time for them to readjust
- Allow them some private time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally
- Don't tell them that they are *'lucky it wasn't worse'* or *'you will get over it'*, or *'pull yourself together'*
- Instead tell them that you want to understand and assist them as and when they would like you to



If you need personal support or guidance on how best to help yourself or someone else, then get in touch with your organisation's welfare department; your line management and/or your GP. Use other 'ordinary' sources of support such as friends and colleagues.

It's worth remembering that most people recover from a traumatic event and it's important to take each day as it comes, especially at first. Getting back to whatever was normal for you before the traumatic event is also important as is gently beginning to focus on what you are going to do next.

However, if you still feel distressed or are having problems getting through each day after a month or so, don't be afraid to ask for help.



The Fishermen's Mission provides UK wide support through their network of welfare personnel. For further information please visit:

<http://www.fishermensmission.org.uk/find-us/>



Another source of help and support is the port chaplain, to whom you can speak in the utmost confidence. If he or she is unable to assist you will be referred onto specialist support. For contact details of Apostleship of the Sea port chaplains please visit: <http://www.apostleshipofthesea.org.uk/contact-our-chaplains>. To contact a Mission to Seafarers chaplain visit: [www.missiontoseafarers.org](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org)



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