The Distance Between Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress is Short – Managing Yourself



Few people get through life without witnessing a traumatic event. Maybe you are driving and spot another car spinning out of control before it crashes it's hit by a semi-truck. Or perhaps something terrible happens at work and you witness employees losing their lives.

People who have witnessed such events often will say their lives have been turned upside down because nothing shows the fragility of human life quite like knowing that someone who was alive two seconds ago is gone.

It's common for witnesses to keep replaying horrifying images in their minds for days or weeks. It's a switch that cannot be shut off, no matter how much one might want to.

Nausea, loss of appetite, dizziness, headache, depression, confusion, grief, nightmares, insomnia, helplessness, fear, confusion, and a sense of detachment from reality are among the symptoms of stress related to involvement in traumatic events.

People handle these events differently. Some want to talk out their feelings are quite emotional, while others clam up and stuff their feelings inside.

But failing to deal with one's feelings will not make them disappear. Such avoidance can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and intense emotional/physical reaction to a traumatic event that can last for months.

People suffering from PTSD may withdraw from activities, people, laces and thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic incident.

They also may become irritable and prone to outbursts of anger and find it difficult to concentrate. Flashbacks and nightmares along with physical symptoms, such as chills and shaking are associated with PTSD.

As a supervisor who witnesses a traumatic event, you will be caught in a whirlwind of activities in the days following it, including being interviewed by police and government occupational safety and health officials.

You may believe it’s important to not show or share your feelings with workers, because you may be seen as a weak person who cannot handle a tough situation. In reality, not taking to workers about what you are all feeling may lead them to believe you are cold and unfeeling. How you decide to deal with that issue is your business, but you’ll need to deal with your own feelings in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

Here are some coping strategies from the US CDD you can use. Share these with others that may be going through the same thing.

- Understand that your symptoms are normal, especially in the first few days following a traumatic event.
- Try to stick to your usual routine.
- Find ways to relax and be kind to yourself.
- Recognize that you cannot control everything.
- Do not shy away from situations, people, and places that remind you of the trauma.
- Take time to resolve day-to-day conflicts so they do not add to your stress.
- Turn to family, friends, clergy, or professionals for support and talk about your experiences and feelings with them.
- Try to engage in leisure and recreational activities, even though that may be the last thing you feel like doing.
- Recognize the need for seeking trained help and call a mental health center if you are feeling overwhelmed.

According to the CDC, about half of those with PTSD recover within three months without treatment. This is not always the case – sometimes, symptoms do not go away on their own or last for more than three months. This depends on the many factors including the severity of the event, exposure to the event or seriousness of the threat to life, the number of times an event happened, a history of past trauma, and psychological problems before the event.

Everyone deals with trauma differently – there is no single solution for everyone but using some of these coping strategies for yourself or knowing them so you are able to help others can start the path for healing.