



The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) is part of the Department of Psychiatry, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

RECOVERY AFTER WITNESSING A TRAUMATIC EVENT

A traumatic event can be a very difficult experience. Witnessing someone being harmed or killed may be especially stressful. Such events often undermine our sense of safety and require time to heal. The recovery from traumatic events can take many roads.

Grief and mourning is an important part of recovery. Leaders of a community or workplace are an important director of the recovery. Rituals and establishing memorials can enable many to move to resolution of the feelings of fear, loss and change in meaning of their lives. Finding meaning in a tragedy is often a part of recovery.

Grief is the normal reaction to loss. It includes sadness, feelings of loss and disorganization, and can include irritability and thoughts and images of lost loved ones.

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Distinguishing prolonged grief from depression and when and how to intervene are important questions. There are very good treatments for both depression and prolonged complicated bereavement.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is one of the disorders we see after exposure to traumatic events. Directly witnessing a traumatic event can be extremely stressful, especially for those who's loved ones are involved. Early opportunities to talk with friends and colleagues can be helpful. Knowing how to get help if symptoms persist is important for those exposed. If you have distressing symptoms that persist or interfere with your work or personal life, talk with your primary care provider. PTSD can be treated with psychotherapy, medications or both.

