

### What can you do to help yourself?

There is no easy solution for what is best for each person, so you must start with who you are, your needs and the situation you are in. Nevertheless, we can mention some measures which have proven to help others:

#### **Regain control of your own life**

- Every effort you make to regain the feeling that you are in control of your own life is important. Making your own decisions every time it is possible may help to restore your self-respect and dignity. Even making small everyday decisions on your own - like when you are going to go for a walk, or who you are going to have coffee with, may be small steps in this positive direction.

#### **Establish daily routines**

- Eat meals at regular times as much as possible. Reduce or get alcohol consumption under control.  
- Try to get adequate rest, preferably on a regular basis.  
- Get involved in physical activities.  
- Exercise, play with children or go for walks on a regular basis.  
- Set small realistic goals for yourself in order to manage difficulties. For example, re-establish daily routines for you and your family.

#### **Look after your emotional needs**

- Allow yourself to mourn and give yourself TIME to mourn.  
- Accept your feelings as they are. Feeling anger does not mean that you want to hurt someone, for example. If you feel you are out of control this does not mean that you will lose control. Feeling helpless does not mean you are helpless.

- Remember to use what has worked for you in earlier periods of crisis and stress.
- Contact family, friends or persons you feel safe with.
- It can be important to talk about your ordeals and your reactions. It helps to talk about your ordeals and what you have learned from them with people you trust.
- Be careful when choosing who you want to talk to about your ordeals. There are people who will be of help to you by listening, but there are also others who may make you feel more lonely or more confused afterwards.
- The things you have suffered in a war may affect your sexual needs. Talk with your partner about how close to each other you want to be so that your relationship will be good for you both.
- Certain situations such as holidays, flag days, important dates in your life or information seen on television or heard on radio may arouse painful memories. This will always happen in one way or another, but try to predict this and prepare yourself.

Even though your difficulties may appear insurmountable just now, remember that many people with similar ordeals have in fact managed to build up meaningful lives over time.

#### If your problems are too great

If your reactions after your ordeals should be too difficult to bear in your daily activities, or if they persist strongly for more than a month, you should consider contacting professional help. If this is the case call your doctor who can refer you to other professionals experienced in this type of help.

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## FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED THE ORDEALS OF WAR



## RECOVERING FROM THE ORDEALS OF WAR

People who have suffered harsh ordeals in a war are affected in different ways. How a person reacts will vary from one person to the next. While some people might react immediately after their ordeals, it may take years before others react. How you react also depends on your age. Children often react in different ways than adults. If you are worried about your own or a loved one's reactions, you must remember that often many reactions are quite common to people who have experienced the ordeals of war.

- **Actually not reacting would be more abnormal.**

But it is important to understand some of these reactions as this could be of assistance in getting back on your feet again after suffering the ordeals of war. This brochure looks at various reactions and strategies for mastering them, especially for adults who have had very difficult ordeals in a war.

### How do people react?

After the ordeals of war, a person's immediate reactions may be ones of shock, disbelief, silence, withdrawal and denial. Later the person may feel anger, rage, fear, sorrow, bewilderment, guilt, frustration and a number of other emotions. Even if these are individual reactions, there are many emotions and reactions which are common to the victims of violence, especially in cases of repeated or long-lasting violence. If a person has suffered much because of war, he or she may be affected in most ways. Thoughts, feelings, behaviour, physical functions and relations with other people may be affected. The following is a list of some of the common effects the ordeals of war may have on your day-to-day life:

### *Disruption of thoughts, you may have*

- difficulty remembering things
- difficulty in making decisions
- a sense of confusion
- feelings of self-reproach
- too many thoughts at one time
- suicidal thoughts
- memories which suddenly hit you hard
- constantly recurring recollections of episodes

### *Emotional distress may manifest itself as*

- a sense of helplessness and hopelessness
- sorrow
- difficulty getting in touch with your feelings
- fear/dread/anxiety about your own safety
- guilt feelings
- a feeling of vulnerability and dependency
- anger/rage
- a "roller-coaster" of emotions
- nightmares
- a sense of inferiority
- a feeling of isolation
- a feeling of losing control over your life
- fear of what others are thinking
- fear of more violence/terror

### *Physical complaints you might have*

- fatigue
- change in sleeping habits
- diminished appetite
- stomach disorders
- vomiting/diarrhoea
- sweating fits and high pulse
- chest pains
- headaches
- back and neck pains
- susceptibility to colds or influenza

### *Possible affects on behaviour*

- alcohol/medication/drug abuse
- strong reactions to small changes in your environments(s) (sound, visits etc.)
- confusion in your daily activities
- you do not manage to carry out tasks you previously mastered

### *Change in relationships with others*

- you have trouble trusting other people
- there is a change in sexual activity
- you make erroneous generalizations about other people
- you have difficulty in getting close to other people
- you have critical attitudes to others
- you feel like a stranger in your own family and with friends and colleagues
- you feel lonely
- you attach yourself too closely to certain people

### Guilt - a common reaction

One of the most common reactions after the ordeals of war is the feeling of guilt. This reaction is often not understood by others. You can feel guilty about what has happened to you, guilty for not having looked after yourself or your loved ones well enough, guilty for not having been aware of or reacted to warning signs, guilty for having survived - a feeling of being responsible for what happened to you.