

Flourish!

Choose well – Think well – Live well

Caring When Life is Traumatic

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. Lam 3:21-23 NKJV

After a severe trauma we often feel shocked, frozen, and numb. This is normal and it's the body's way of protecting itself from being overwhelmed by pain and distress. It can help to sit still, keep warm, sip a soothing drink, take deep breaths, and be hugged and held. It's also helpful to be with someone who can comfort us and care for us, because they can help us to calm down, and feel loved and safe.

Remember that someone who has experienced a severe trauma may say and do things that they would not usually do. They need to find ways to express their deep anguish. Accept the person warmly, don't comment on their words and actions, and don't judge them. Keep these moments safe and confidential.

- **Compassionate listening involves giving the person your full attention with warm eye-contact, summing up what they have said every now and then, or writing down their key points on a piece of paper to show that you are really listening and understanding. Listen underneath their words for any support they might need, such as caring comfort, encouragement, warm acceptance, practical help, and a sense of feeling safe and secure. Think about their other need because they may not be aware that they are hungry, thirsty, tired, in need of medical attention, or that they need to tell someone official about what has happened to them.**

Sometimes it helps to talk about the trauma to a comforting and soothing listener. Comfort can sound like a warm, close silence, crying together, or words like "I am so very sorry that you went through that experience. No one should ever have to go through something like that." "I care about you, and I care about your pain." "I wish I had been there to comfort you right away, so that you didn't have to go through all of that pain alone."

Where possible, provide deep comfort on the same day as the traumatic event, so that the experience is soothed before the person sleeps. The memory is processed by the brain overnight, and some comforting and warm connections may lower the level of distress, which can otherwise lead to an even greater risk of anxiety and depression.

- **Sometimes it can re-traumatise a person to tell their story. It can bring back all the painful memories. So let the person choose whether to tell their story or not. They can talk about the effect of the experience on their life, instead. Ask them about the choices they made that have helped them to manage their pain and distress better. Then they can choose to do more of the things that help them, and less of the things that make it more difficult to cope.**

Help people to access counselling and psychological support as soon as possible after a trauma. A person who is very distressed may need to have their grief and distress calmed and comforted for a while before they can make the best use of counselling support.