

ASKING FOR HELP

There are a number of common strategies that individuals utilize when coping with extraordinary stress in their lives. These strategies, while effective at manageable levels of stress, can become unproductive or detrimental when stress reaches overwhelming or traumatic levels.

Sometimes post-traumatic stress symptoms worsen and ordinary efforts at coping don't seem to work very well. Before people with post-traumatic stress learn effective and healthy coping methods, they may try to cope with their distress and other reactions in ways that lead to more problems.

If the survivor of trauma or their loved ones feel overwhelmed, it is important that they reach out and ask for help to turn things around. When a trauma survivor or their loved ones take direct action to cope with problems a greater sense of personal power and control are regained. Active coping means recognizing and accepting the impact of a traumatic experience and then taking concrete action to improve things. When survivors and their loved ones are able to talk about their problems with others, something helpful often results.

The following information will provide you with resources for assistance. Please do not hesitate to use these resources.



IMPORTANT RESOURCES

Ohio VA Medical Facilities:

Brecksville	440-526-3030
Chillicothe	740-773-1141
Cincinnati	513-861-3100
Columbus	614-257-5200
Dayton	937-268-6511
Toledo	419-259-2000
Wade Park	216-791-3800

VA Benefits:	1-800-827-1000
VA Tele-Nurse (Ohio):	1-888-838-6446
Military One Source:	1-800-655-4545
VA Center Readjustment Counseling Service	513-763-3500

Ohio Resource Network (ORN) Referral Helpline for Substance Abuse Services

1-800-788-7254 (option 2)
Available 24 Hours/Day, 7 Days/Week

State of Ohio Mental Health Referral Helpline

1-877-275-6364 (1-877-ASK-ODMH)
Available M-F, 9 am to 4 pm

Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator

<http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/facilitylocator.doc.htm>

Mental Health Facilities Locator

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/databases/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Referral Helplines:

1-800-662-HELP (4357)
1-800-662-9832 (Spanish)
1-800-228-0427 (TDD)

Available 24 Hours/Day, 7 Days/Week

The information in this pamphlet
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Coping With Stress...

A GUIDE FOR SOLDIERS AND FAMILIES



UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND TRAUMA

Trauma can cause severe stress, which may become unmanageable despite the best stress management efforts. Let's look at why this happens and what you can do about it.

Most, if not all, individuals experience post-traumatic stress following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents or violent personal assaults. People who suffer from post-traumatic stress often re-live the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping and feel detached or estranged. These symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair the person's daily life.

Traumatic events cause severe stress reactions that are particularly hard to manage. Trauma involves a unique kind of physical/emotional shock that escalates the "fight-flight" stress response (feeling angry or scared) into "super-stress" (feeling terrified, stunned, horrified, like your life is passing before your eyes or so overwhelmed you blank out.)

Because the symptoms of post-traumatic stress and other trauma reactions change how a trauma survivor feels and acts, traumatic experiences that happen to one member of a family can affect everyone else in the family. When trauma reactions are severe and go on for some time without treatment, they can cause major problems in a family.

WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS AND TRAUMA

Stress is a *normal* response of the body and mind. Everyone feels stress when gearing up to deal with major life events (such as marriage, divorce, births, deaths, or starting or ending a job, military deployment etc.) or handling everyday hassles like arguments, financial headaches, deadlines or traffic jams.

Physical signs of a stress response include:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Muscle Tension

Emotional signs of a stress response include:

- Excitement
- Exhilaration
- Joy
- Frustration
- Nervousness
- Discouragement
- Anxiety
- Anger

Prolonged stress can drain your body and mind. Some techniques for managing stress include:

- Mental relaxation (exercises)
- Positive thinking
- Problem solving
- Anger control
- Time management
- Exercise
- Responsible assertiveness
- Interpersonal communication

STRESS, ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Post-traumatic stress does not automatically cause problems with alcohol and other drug use; there are many people with post-traumatic stress who do not have problems with alcohol and other drugs. However, post-traumatic stress and alcohol and other drugs together can be serious trouble for the trauma survivor and his or her family. Stressful events may influence the use of alcohol or other drugs. Alcohol abuse and other drug use is associated with a chaotic lifestyle, which reduces family emotional closeness, increases family conflict and reduces parenting abilities.

Post-traumatic stress symptoms often are worsened by alcohol use. Although alcohol can provide a temporary feeling of distraction and relief, it also reduces the ability to concentrate, enjoy life and be productive.

Self-medicating with alcohol can:

- Impair one's ability to sleep restfully and cope with trauma memories and stress.
- Increase emotional numbing, social isolation, anger and irritability, depression and hyper-vigilance.

Some individuals with post-traumatic stress resort to alcohol in an attempt to cope with sleep disturbances (nightmares, trouble falling asleep and frequent awakenings, etc.) While alcohol may appear to help decrease the severity and number of disturbances, it ultimately hinders treatment and can lead to other serious health-related issues.