



Trauma Counselling/Supervision

Responses to Trauma:

In the event of any natural disaster or in fact, any happening outside the scope of our normal experience and coping abilities, it is natural to feel stressed, anxious and on edge, and have difficulty focusing and managing usual, everyday activities. In stressful times, especially when we don't know what is going to happen next, and we also feel concerned for others in our care, our usual coping mechanisms become stretched.

First, it is important to recognise that this is a product of the way our bodies and minds are programmed for survival, and we automatically get into the "fight or flight" mode, with the body pumping adrenaline, our muscles tensed for action, our heart rate increased and our anxiety levels elevated, so we are sharp and alert for potential danger and whatever action is necessary. This stance strains the body's resources, but is usually relatively brief, returning to normal after the danger has passed. However, when stress is ongoing and we feel uncertain about our future, we need to summon more support and also find ways of diffusing pent-up stress and anxiety, while working towards a return to normal functioning. Research and experience has shown that counselling and debriefing after these events, which acknowledges and validates our feelings and reactions, can assist people in this way, and prevent prolonged anxiety and stress.

Some tips that might help:

- Allow people to express their real feelings, without judgement or reservations.
- Give honest and simple answers to questions, but remember it's OK not to have all the answers, and say so.
- Try to be an "active listener", giving feedback and showing support and empathy.
- Respect peoples' differences: some may express themselves easily and freely, while others may find it difficult to show vulnerability and their fears; time and patience and just being with the person, helps.
- Rather than giving your own opinions and advice (unless specifically requested), try to bring out and support the other person's ideas and preferences, in a realistic context of what's possible for them.
- Encourage maintenance of their connections to family/whanau and friends, and lifestyle balance (where possible) in regard to diet, exercise and some form of activity.
- Deep breathing, relaxation techniques and expression of feelings will all help diffusion of stress and anxiety.
- Encourage hope and a positive perspective within "the big picture", and remind people of the benefit of some humour where possible, to help "let go" of being stressed and serious (without making light of the situation).
- Talking to, and helping others, can help you feel connected and help take your mind off your stresses, and allowing others to reciprocate helps family, whanau and communities to feel mutually supported.
- Those who are counselling and helping others can also become stressed from hearing about others' stress and helplessness (vicarious trauma), and also need support, debriefing, and good supervision for their work.

ABACUS Counselling, Training and Supervision have well-trained, experienced and qualified counsellors and supervisors who can assist with counselling for affected people and supervision for those who are working to support others. For further information, please contact us.

Phone 09 360 6957 **Email** abacus@acts.co.nz **Web** www.acts.co.nz
Mail PO Box 90710 Victoria Street West, Auckland 1142

