

In this brochure we have compiled information that may be important in your situation.

Responses to an extremely distressing event

Particularly distressing events are a major disruption of normal life. Affected persons suddenly lose their daily routines. Immediately after such an event, many persons experience strong emotions and reactions, such as

- helplessness
- fear
- depression
- feelings of guilt for surviving the event, irrespective of whether justified or not
- emotional disarray
- disorientation, not knowing what to do
- incapacity of performing everyday chores
- speculating why the event happened

These and similar reactions are normal after an extremely distressing event. They are normal reactions to an “abnormal” event. Most people get over them within a relatively short time.

It is, however, possible that there will be further disorders during the next few days or weeks like

- severe nervousness
- sleeping disorders, nightmares
- persistent feeling of futility, hopelessness, loss of previous interests
- memory gaps, concentration problems
- haunting memories or images that cannot be suppressed
- physical stress reactions, such as loss of appetite and energy, unusual tiredness
- increased need for alcohol or tranquilizers

Normally these reactions also wear off in the course of weeks and eventually disappear.

What can affected persons do to help themselves?

After experiencing a distressing event, it can be helpful to allow yourself a quiet period. Take your time to overcome and recover from what has happened. Other affected persons also report relief if you...

- ...pay attention to your momentary needs and take time to meet them.
- ...are supported by your partner, your family and friends

- ...do not hesitate to seek professional help if necessary.
- ...talk about your experiences with persons who understand your situation.
- ...try not to suppress your feelings and reactions. (Experience shows that this tends to make matters worse).
- ...go back to activities you usually enjoy.

How can family members and friends help?

When affected persons want to talk about their experiences make sure to listen. Take a lot of time and take their feelings seriously. Distressing events provoke corresponding responses. These are normal and usually go away after some time. Understanding family members and friends can help affected persons to get over the distressing event faster.

After some disastrous events it is necessary to organize things, for example there may be paperwork to do. Practical assistance with these tasks can be very helpful. In general, however, it is important to assist affected persons in that he/she can resume the normal daily routine as soon as possible.

Often the affected person already feels better when he/she is not left alone.

When should you seek professional help?

Sometimes events are so distressing that professional help is advisable. This is especially the case if the reactions described above last more than four weeks.

Watch out for the following signs:

- persistent sleeping disorders
- restlessness
- frequent unwanted memories of the event
- avoiding situations, locations or activities reminding of the event
- constant apathy or lethargy, feeling “numb”
- increased consumption of alcohol and/or drugs
- the condition making it impossible for the affected person to cope with daily routines (e.g. household chores or going to work regularly)

Do take these signs seriously!

Professional help can prevent negative after-effects or chronic conditions.

In Hamburg you find a number of institutions that can help you.

Among them are counselling centres, therapists, pastoral counsellors and doctors.

Further information on where to get professional help

Office of
Emergency Pastoral Care in Hamburg
Ph. 040 – 42851 4051

www.notfallseelsorge-hamburg.de

Presented by:

The emergency pastoral care in Hamburg is an ecumenical work of the evangelical and catholic church. It offers pastoral care to all people in Hamburg regardless of their social, cultural or religious background.

Immediately after an disastrous event or distressing situation emergency pastoral care provides support and assistance on request.

The call for emergency pastoral care can only be made via the central emergency line “112” of the rescue services in Hamburg

This brochure is based upon information by the „Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenhilfe“ (BBK) following the brochures of the Crisis & Care Intervention Team Vorarlberg (KIT Vorarlberg) and the Acute Intervention Team Wien (ABW).



EMERGENCY PASTORAL CARE HAMBURG

RESPONDING TO A DISASTROUS EVENT

INFORMATION FOR AFFECTED PERSONS AND THEIR FAMILIES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HANDLING SITUATIONS OF DISTRESS

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