Look after yourself

What is trauma?

Following a deeply disturbing or threatening event, or trauma, it is normal to feel distressed and overwhelmed. A traumatic event is where a person is exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation. Examples of traumas include:

- Involvement in war or terrorist attacks
- Experiencing serious illness or injury
- Assault (including physical or sexual assault, mugging or robbery, or domestic violence)
- Accident (including a car accident)
- Witnessing something terrible happen including any of the above. *The person does not need to be directly involved in the event in order for it to be traumatic. The person might witness it happening to someone else, or learn about a traumatic event that has occurred to them.*

What are the signs of trauma?

The main signs of trauma include, but are not limited, to those below:

- Anxiety or fear of danger to self or loved ones.
- Avoidance of situations that remind you of the traumatic event.
- Being easily startled by loud noises or sudden movements.
- Flashbacks where images of the traumatic event come into your mind suddenly for no apparent reason or where you mentally re-experience the event.
- Physical symptoms such as tense muscles, trembling or shaking, nausea, headaches, sweating, and tiredness.
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including loss of appetite or interest in sex.
- Sadness, feelings of loss, or aloneness.
- Sleep problems, including getting to sleep, waking in the middle of the night, dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event.
- Problems with thinking, concentration, or remembering things.
- Preoccupation with thinking about the trauma.
- Guilt and self-doubt for not having acted in some other way during the trauma, or for being better off than others, or feeling responsible for another person’s death or injury.
- Anger or irritability at what has happened.

How to Deal with an Acute Stress Reaction?

Ensure your safety first. If the traumatic situation is ongoing, get yourself to a place of safety.

Talk with someone you trust about what has happened. Support and understanding at a difficult time can be very helpful.

Understand that how you are feeling is very normal for someone who has gone through traumatic event.

Give yourself time to deal with your thoughts and fears. Understand that the way you are feeling will not last forever.

Spend time doing things you enjoy – relaxing, going for walks, seeing friends.

It will be important to confront situations associated with the traumatic event, but do it gradually. You may decide to go back to work, but go just for a few hours at first and then build it up slowly.

Avoid drugs and alcohol to cope. They will only make it worse. Try to find other ways to relax.