



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

BUILDING A SELF-CARE PLAN

Stress or anxiety are normal reactions to a traumatic event. Reactions can range from moderate to overwhelming for individuals directly impacted. Possible reactions one might experience include:

- **Re-experiencing the trauma** (recurrent dreams of the event, flashbacks, and intrusive memories)
- **Feelings of uneasiness in situations that bring back memories of the trauma or event**
- **Avoidance behaviour** (such as persistent avoidance of things associated with the event)
- **Emotional numbing** (feeling "not entirely present", preoccupied, distracted)
- **Reduced interest in others and the outside world** (avoiding others and disengaging from activities that normally bring enjoyment, fatigue)
- **Persistent increased arousal** (constant watchfulness, irritability, jumpiness, being easily startled, outbursts of rage, insomnia)

These reactions are normal and are experienced when individuals are in abnormally distressing situations. While most people recover after acute traumatic events on their own or with the assistance of a mental health professional within weeks of the event, it is important to note that some individuals do not experience these reactions until later. In either scenario, it is important to acknowledge your reactions and seek appropriate support.

Self-care techniques

- Prioritize all personal safety and health needs.
- Learn and practice controlled breathing methods (slow, relaxed breathing) to reduce physical symptoms of anxiety, fear, and panic. Avoid breathing too deeply or rapidly as this can cause physical symptoms of panic.
- Get enough sleep.
- Reduce caffeine intake to 300mg or less per day.
- Learn and practice daily relaxation methods to reduce physical symptoms of tension.
- Get regular exercise.
- Identify and challenge exaggerated words and pessimistic thoughts.
- Use evidence-based anxiety websites or self-help books.