

Coping with a crisis

The harsh reality

No matter how sound and healthy your normal state of mind and body, there is every chance that at some stage during your life you will face some sort of crisis. It may be brought on by a build-up of stress or it may be sudden and unexpected, such as becoming the victim of a crime or by suffering the sudden loss of something or someone precious to you.

Normal reactions

You will naturally feel terrible and react with disbelief and a whole range of emotions and physical feelings that are quite unfamiliar to you. These reactions include fear, helplessness, sadness, anger, shame, guilt, frustration and a terrible let down. The 'why me?' feeling is very real. The feelings usually last for only a few minutes at any one time. All this is a normal response to a crisis, and then you go through a recovery cycle.

Recovery

You may not think so at the moment, but you will soon learn to cope; nature heals in time. The human body has a remarkable ability to cope both physically and mentally with extreme stress. It is therefore important for your own sake and that of your loved ones who rely on you that you cope and keep on an even keel until time heals your misfortune. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

Rules to help you cope

1. Give expression to your emotions

You simply must accept your reactions as normal and not be afraid to cry or call out. Do not bottle up feelings.

2. Talk things over with your friends

Do not overburden them, but seek their advice and listen to them. Do not avoid talking about what has happened.



Talking with a friend can help you cope

3. Focus on things as they are now—at this moment

Do not brood on the past and your misfortune. Concentrate on the present and future in a positive way.

4. Consider your problems one at a time

Do not allow your mind to race wildly over a wide range of problems. You can cope with one problem at a time.

5. Act firmly and promptly to solve a problem

Once you have worked out a way to tackle a problem, go for it. Taking positive action is a step in allowing yourself to get on with life.

6. Occupy yourself and your mind as much as possible

Any social activity—sports, theatre, cards, discussion groups, club activity—is better than sitting around alone. Many people find benefit from a holiday visit to an understanding friend or relative. Religious people usually find their faith and prayer life a great source of strength at this time.

7. Do not nurse grudges or blame other people

This is not easy, but you must avoid getting hostile. In particular, do not get angry with yourself and your family, especially your spouse.

8. Set aside some time every day for physical relaxation

Make a point of doing something physical such as going for a walk, swimming or enjoying an easy exercise routine.

9. Stick to your daily routine as much as possible

At times of crisis a familiar pattern of regular meals and chores can bring a sense of order and security. Avoid taking your problems to bed and getting sleepless nights. Try to 'switch off' after 8 pm. Taking sleeping tablets for those few bad nights will help.

10. Consult your family doctor when you need help

Your doctor will clearly understand your problem, because stress and crisis problems are probably the commonest he or she handles. Consult your doctor sooner rather than later.

- Remember that there are many community resources to help you cope (e.g. ministers, social workers, community nurses, crisis centres, church organisations).
- Take care: drive carefully to avoid accidents, which are commoner during this time.