

Dealing With Your Secondary Trauma

When we witness emergencies, it is natural to go into “crisis mode.” When this happens, stress hormones - adrenaline and cortisol - start to flood our brains and bodies. These hormones allow us to keep moving but often make our bodies feel on edge, jittery, nauseous, or numb. It’s important to take steps to flush these stress hormones out of our body so we can begin to feel like ourselves again. Remember, we are much more helpful to the youth in our lives when we are taking care of ourselves! Here are some tips to help you take care of yourself:

- ☆ Drink cold water! Hydration is key to eliminating stress hormones from your body, and cold water can calm the brain if it is in a traumatized or crisis state.
- ☆ Take deep breaths OUT. Breathing in normally, and then pushing air out (for as long as you can) can reduce a stress response. This will slow your body down by calming your central nervous system.
- ☆ Exercise large muscle groups. It’s important to get the trauma out of our bodies. What kind of exercise do you prefer? Try to make time to do it. Even if for a short time, spending time running, playing sports, or doing yoga can get us out of our heads and help us become more grounded in our bodies.
- ☆ Turn off the news and stop reading the papers or electronic media as much as possible. Very often news cycles repeat the same information in different ways, so remind yourself you will likely not miss out on new information. You are allowed to take a break!
- ☆ Find your support system, whether it be friends, religious/faith community, family, existing support group, or your therapist. With them, discuss fears, feelings, and safety plans. Healing grows in community.

Children and adults who have already experienced trauma, grief, and loss may be more impacted by mass tragedies in the news. It may bring up feelings from previous traumas, and more intense reactions. Be sure to monitor sleep and eating habits, encourage the use of healthy coping skills that have helped before, and take time to listen and support. Consider revisiting supportive spaces you utilized for the previous traumas, such as grief groups, therapy, in-school supportive adults, and mental health services, if reactions to the current tragedy go on for longer than a few weeks.



To learn more contact:

Meghan Szafran, MS, LPC, CT
Director of School & Community Services
Email: meghan@upliftphilly.org
Phone: 267-437-3123 x 1