

Surviving Trauma

**If you have lived through war.
If you have been a victim of violence.
If you have lost your country, family members, friends, community...**

And if you feel

...hopeless	...afraid
...very sad	...anxious
...angry	...depressed
...bitter	...unable to express emotions
...mistrustful	...forgetful
...unable to sleep	...the need to use drugs and alcohol
...troubled by memories	...very guilty
...unable to eat	...shameful
...unable to think clearly	...suicidal
...confused	

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

These are normal feelings and emotions that may result from traumatic events, even if those events happened a long time ago.

Traumatic events include war, torture, violent personal assault (emotional, sexual, physical), being a prisoner, living in fear, being publicly shamed, losing loved ones and natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes).

Our instinct often allows us to survive traumatic events. When we are safe and out of danger, however, many of these feelings may surface and become overwhelming. Although some of us may go on living without connecting our present suffering to past experiences, it is possible that a single event may cause an emotional breakdown. That event may be as simple as a loud noise or meeting someone in the street, or as difficult as the loss of a loved one.

Each of us is affected in different ways depending on the traumatic experience, our age, gender, life history and our ability to cope. Two feelings commonly shared by survivors of traumatic events are guilt and shame.

Guilt means feeling sad because we survived when others did not, or that we have a better life than people we love.

Guilt may also come from believing that we have caused, and/or contributed to the problem.

SHAME COMES FROM FEELING POWERLESS THROUGH:

- humiliation
- losing our identity
- depending on others for our basic necessities

- not being able to defend ourselves
- not being able to speak up
- not being able to help or protect others
- feeling abandoned by our loved ones

Children show the effects of trauma in ways that adults may not understand. Signs of trauma in children can include bed-wetting, nightmares, self-destructive behavior and extreme fear of being alone.

The effects of trauma in children may be missed because...

- parents or guardians may be suffering from the effects of trauma and be unable to attend to children's needs.
- adults often think that children forget and are less aware and less affected by traumatic events.
- children sometimes hide their pain if they think it will add to the suffering of their parents or guardians.

REMEMBER: Children need special care and attention.

These are some of the ways we can help ourselves:

- Acknowledge the pain without pushing it away.
- Speak about our experience and listen to others.
- Take care of ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- Recognize the positive effects of surviving.
- Provide and receive emotional support from others who have gone through similar situations.
- Be aware of the signs of trauma in our children.
- Seek help for ourselves and/or our children, if necessary.