

## Where Can I Get Help?

Having family and friends around to offer encouragement and support often helps; however, sometimes the pain is too powerful for a person to handle alone and professional assistance may be necessary. A fresh perspective from a trained professional can help a lot.

Some professionals you can talk to include :

- ◆ A counselor or therapist
- ◆ A doctor
- ◆ A trusted spiritual leader

To find a counselor in your area, contact your insurance provider or call the New Mexico Crisis and Access Line.

If you need to speak with someone immediately, you can call the New Mexico Crisis and Access Line at 1-855-662-7474 toll free.

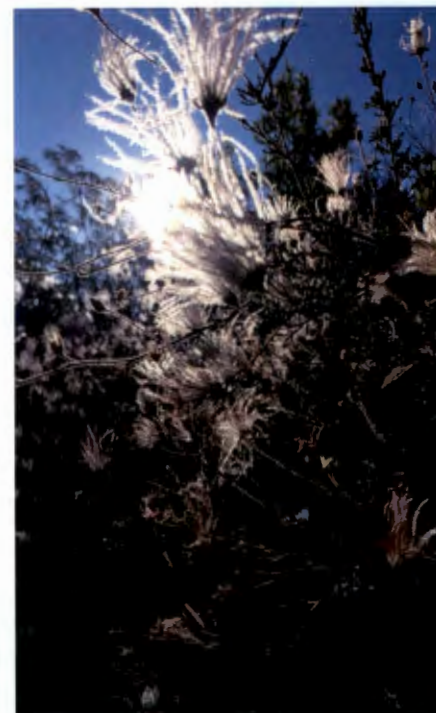


## What Can I Do?

- ◇ Talk to people. Communication is a healing medicine.
- ◇ Understand you are having normal reactions and allow yourself to go through the healing process. Take a look at the “Common Signs” on the next page realizing that stress symptoms are natural responses to a traumatic event.
- ◇ Exercise (appropriate to your physical condition) – especially within the first 24-72 hours.
- ◇ RELAX – take a few deep breaths and let your body unwind.
- ◇ Avoid complicating the situation by abusing drugs or alcohol.
- ◇ Spend time with others. People do care – accept offers to help.
- ◇ Structure your time – keep busy and maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- ◇ Give yourself permission to feel badly and to share those feelings with others.
- ◇ Keep a journal – writing your thoughts and prayers can help you work through confusing and sleepless times.
- ◇ Do things that feel good to you.
- ◇ Do make as many daily decisions as possible, BUT don't make any big life changes.
- ◇ Don't try to fight recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks – they are normal, will typically become less painful, and will decrease over time.
- ◇ Rest – even if you don't think you can.
- ◇ Eat nutritional meals – even if you don't feel like it.

Administrative Office of the Courts  
Court Services Division  
Department of Therapeutic Justice

## Managing the Stress of Secondary Trauma & Cues



NM Administrative Office of the Courts  
Court Services Division



## Why am I feeling stressed?

Sometimes events enter our lives unexpectedly and cause us to experience unusually strong emotional reactions. At times, these responses can affect how we function within our families, our school, our workplace, and in other areas of our daily life. We may even surprise ourselves when we notice “things just don’t seem right.”

You may have heard that these strong emotional, cognitive, spiritual, or physical reactions can occur during, immediately following, or at some time after a traumatic event. These same responses, however, may also be brought on by seeing pictures or hearing stories of other people’s traumatic experience.

Since stress is a common part of our life, we usually have ways of handling it. We might go for a walk or plan a relaxing evening and then get a good night’s sleep and feel better the next day. Sometimes though, the stress seems bigger than usual and what worked to make us feel better in the past isn’t working anymore.

This is when we need a new strategy. And maybe even some help.

## What is Secondary Trauma?

Secondary Trauma is a natural response that can occur due to hearing a firsthand account of a traumatic event and/or seeing images related to the traumatic event. It is often difficult to recognize the signs and symptoms of secondary trauma or compassion fatigue in oneself.

Symptoms of secondary trauma fall into 1 of 4 categories. Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioral and Physical. Often individuals may experience secondary trauma symptoms in various categories.

Cognitive symptoms may include lowered concentration, apathy or lack of interest, rigid thinking and preoccupation with the traumatic event.

Emotional symptoms may include feelings of sadness, guilt, anger, overall emotional numbness or a strong sense of helplessness.

Behavioral symptoms may include difficulty sleeping, change or loss of appetite, increased startle response/jumpiness or withdrawing from activities that previously brought joy.

Physical symptoms may include muscle and joint pain, increased heart rate, difficulty breathing or stomach aches and headaches.\*

It is important to note that secondary trauma symptoms are a natural response to hearing about or seeing images related to traumatic events that are outside your normal daily experiences. While these symptoms can feel overwhelming, the good news is that there are several approaches you can take to heal from secondary trauma. It is also important to note that even seasoned trauma professionals are susceptible to secondary trauma and that these symptoms are not a sign of weakness.

\* These symptoms may suggest the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.

## What are Trauma Cues?

Trauma Cues, also sometimes referred to as Trauma Triggers, are seemingly unrelated events that can cue our brain and/or body into a trauma response. When an individual has experienced a traumatic event the details of the event are stored in a different part of the brain from typical memories and often contain information from several different senses.

Many individuals have experienced positive “cuing” instances that may help us understand how trauma cues work. Have you ever heard a song or smelled something cooking that brought back memories of a loved one as though you were reliving the event? Trauma cues are similar although they typically bring up symptoms related to a negative event.

Trauma cues can be highly varied and difficult to anticipate. You may pass by the area of town where a traumatic event occurred and find yourself experiencing trauma symptoms such as increased heart rate or a sense of fear. You may see, hear or smell something that reminds you in some way of the traumatic event and find yourself experiencing trauma symptoms.

Trauma cues are a helpful indication that it may be time to reach out for assistance. There are several approaches one can take to heal from the effects of trauma.

