



Coping with the Stress of an Adverse Event

If you have recently experienced an unexpected adverse event related to patient care; you may now be experiencing some strong physical or emotional reactions. Even if you are not experiencing these reactions, it is possible you will experience some of the symptoms listed below at some time in the days or weeks ahead. Sometimes the physical and emotional after-shocks of an adverse event appear immediately after an event or not for days or weeks.

Common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction:

Fatigue	Nervousness
Grief over the loss of the patient	Hypervigilance
Muscle tension	Self doubts and/or second guessing
Impaired concentration	Anger
Intrusive thoughts or images	Anxiety
Impaired decision making	Agitation
Uncertainty	Denial
Guilt and blame (even when your/others performance or care giving is not in question)	Sadness
Anger	Decrease in job satisfaction
Loss of trust in caregiver/patient relationship	Decrease in confidence
Decreased sleep/insomnia	Depression
	Questioning of occupation or employer
	Social withdrawal

In terms of coping during this time, it's important to focus on things you can control, primarily self care. Ask yourself, "What do I need to do to enhance my survivorship skills and techniques?" For example, are you pleasure deficient? Increase your pleasure-producing experiences.

Self Care Tips

- Recognize that in your line of work, you are likely to have experiences with unexpected and/or unwanted losses
- Recognize and acknowledge your feelings. Many people deny or try to cover up their emotions to avoid feeling out of control. Although understandable, such denial inhibits recovery and resolution. It also takes precious energy to try and keep these emotions down.
- Talk with others who will provide support and understanding.

- Recognize that in your work there are variables that impact your work with patients that you have little to no control over
- Remind yourself of your successes
- Remind yourself why you have chosen your occupation
- Try not to define your self, your staff or coworkers by this loss
- Practice forgiveness and acceptance of self and others
- Guilt can mask other important emotions: disappointment, sadness, fear, anger and hurt. Make sure you are allowing a full range of emotions, and express feelings as they arise.
- Seek peer support...we tend to be our own worst critics
- Periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time-keep busy
- Talk to people...talk is the most healing medicine
- Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol
- Keep your life as normal as possible
- Spend time with others you truly care about
- Give yourself permission to feel bad and share your feelings with others
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours
- Engage in self nurturing activities: i.e. explore nature, get massage etc.
- Realize that those around you are under stress also
- Maintain a well-balanced diet
- Don't make any major life changes
- Try to rest a bit
- Contact friends
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams, flashbacks are normal. Don't try to fight them. They'll decrease over time and become less painful