

# Psychoeducation for dealing with a personal crisis or a reaction to a crisis

*Having a personal crisis is a normal experience. Most people go through some sort of personal crisis at least once in their lives. This crisis can be due to a terrible or tragic event, or to a major change in your life. How you react, and how long the crisis lasts, will vary depending on what type of crisis it is, what you've gone through earlier, and what support you receive. Most reactions to crises pass by themselves, but in some cases you may need help and care in order to get over a difficult event and move on.*

## What is a personal crisis?

A personal crisis can be defined as a problematic period in a person's life that is triggered by one or several difficult events. These may be sudden, unexpected events or major life changes. Other, more long-lasting difficulties related to school, a separation, or receiving an illness diagnosis can also trigger personal crises.

A personal crisis can have various degrees of severity. It might be caused by anything from a partner leaving you or your best friend moving away, to being the victim of an assault or being forced to flee your home. Examples of events that can lead to a crisis reaction include:

- You or someone close to you is involved in an accident or a disaster.
- Someone close to you dies.
- You are assaulted, raped or robbed.
- You are bullied.
- Your parents get divorced or you move to a new place.
- You are forced to move to another country.

## Different reactions to crises

How you react to a crisis depends on several things. It can make a difference, for example, if the crisis comes suddenly and unexpectedly or if you've had time to prepare for it, or if you experience the crisis alone or together with others. Things you've experienced earlier, and how you are as a person, can also influence how you react.

At the outset of a crisis you may experience any number of different emotions. You may feel helpless, bewildered and insecure. You may also experience anxiety and be worried about the future. And you may feel grief if you've lost someone or something important to you.

Everyone reacts differently, which is perfectly normal. Some people have difficulties sleeping, while others just want to sleep all the time. Some become withdrawn, or irritable, or otherwise change their behaviour, while others want to get back to their everyday routines quickly.

A common reaction is sadness and dejection. Some people only want to cry when they're by themselves, others only when they're with someone else. Some people don't cry at all.

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Others just want talk about what happened, again and again. There is no right or wrong way to react.

## What you can do in order to feel better

It can be chaotic at first, and difficult to do very much at all, but it's important to **try to eat and sleep** and to have **routines**. Spend time with people you feel secure with. It's a good idea to restore order to your everyday life as soon as possible. You may need help if you can't manage to do that on your own. Order can reduce your anxiety and give you a sense of control.

- Try to keep doing what you usually do, like studying or working. If you can't manage that, it's still a good idea to get out of bed reasonably early and do some activity during the day.
- It usually helps to talk about what has happened. Support from other people can help you move on and not get stuck in that which is painful or difficult. That way you can process your personal crisis little by little.
- If you find it too much to talk, you may feel better by dealing with practical matters that need doing, or busying yourself with a hobby. It's OK to take a break from your crisis by doing things that take your mind off it.
- You can try to seek the support of friends, family and relatives, just to have someone to talk to, or get help with practical things from. It can feel difficult to ask for help, but afterwards you will often feel relieved.
- Taking part in ceremonies that have to do with the difficult experience often helps, too. Saying goodbye to a friend who is moving to another country, for example, or attending a funeral.

## When your crisis begins to pass

A personal crisis can force you to think about your life and your future. What happened was most likely not something you had planned, and may not have turned out as you had expected. Still, in most cases you'll eventually be able to accept what happened, and your reactions will subside.

Life can feel heavy and hopeless when you're in the middle of a difficult period. But a crisis can sometimes also lead to personal development. When your deepest sentiments are awakened you have the opportunity to learn something about yourself. Signs that the crisis is starting to pass may include a returning sense of security and a fading of your inner pain. You begin to feel a sense of balance again, and you can spend time with other people like you used to. You can feel joy and become engaged with things again, and your thoughts about the future feel more positive.

## If your crisis doesn't pass

Sometimes the difficulties associated with your personal crisis can remain for a long time, without showing signs of passing. This might be that you have recurring unwanted thoughts about the experience you had, that you avoid things which remind you of the event, and that you continue to feel anxious, insecure or dejected. If these reactions persist without

diminishing, it may a good idea to seek professional help. You and a care worker can then be provided with the tools to help you move on from the event.

## Sources and reading suggestions

Umo.se and 1177.se