

The aftermath
of a
terrorist attack?

How can you deal with the consequences of an attack: practical tips

- Keep going on as much as possible with your normal daily activities. That will make you feel in control of the situation. This is also important for the peace and order in your family and for your children.
- Don't keep watching TV where the images of the attack are constantly repeated. This applies to your children too.
- Meet other people. Do not isolate yourself. Talk to one another.
- Ask people around you for help if you need it.
- Do not hide your feelings. Do not pretend nothing happened. Crying is OK, but then pull yourself together and get back to daily life and business.
- Sometimes problems seem to be so huge that you don't know where to start. Divide big problems into smaller parts.
- Talk to adolescents about what happened. Be honest about the situation, but adapt your information to your child's development. Make sure your child feels safe.
- Don't take your feelings out on people around you.
- Be moderate on alcohol and drugs.
- Take good care of yourself: eat healthy, try to take enough rest. Take time to move and to relax. Maybe you can do something for others?
- Search professional help if you keep on having bad feelings.

How do people react to a terrorist attack?

Most children and adults that were hit by a terrorist attack, show stress reactions the following days or weeks. These are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Some examples are anxiety, sorrow, mourning, anger, indignation, resentment, blame, shame, helplessness and hopelessness. You may feel blunted, loose interest and pleasure in daily business, or have difficulties to concentrate or to remember things. You may worry a lot, suffer from nightmares, returning thoughts or intrusive memories of the attack. Your body may react as well. You can suffer stressed feelings, fatigue, sleeping problems and physical pain. But even if your reactions are intense, you will probably recover from it soon afterwards.

Who is running the risk to develop long term symptoms?

Most people involved in an attack will have no long term complaints. People are mostly resilient and able to pick up normal life again after some time. However, people that were directly involved, young children and people who suffered critical incidents or had mental complaints before, may have more difficulty to deal with an attack. They run a bigger risk to develop long term complaints, for example a posttraumatic stress syndrome or depression.

What can you do to help someone who survived an attack or who lost someone due to the attack?

It is easier to deal with critical incidents if people support one another. If you feel able to listen to the people involved, do so. It is good for them to pick up daily routine. You can help by dividing big problems into smaller parts and setting small and achievable targets, or by searching distraction together in a hobby, sport or an excursion.

If you conclude that someone is not OK at all after a month, you may bring up the possibility of searching professional help.

How long may possible complaints persist?

One of the goals of terrorism is to frighten the population. Depending on the threat, you will sense anxiety to some extent. It is hard to predict and it depends on the situation how long this will go on.

As soon as the threat has disappeared, most people involved in a terrorist attack will start to feel better after about one month, even if they may still be very shocked.

For those directly afflicted, these reactions will persist much longer. As time goes by the 'downcast' periods should become shorter, and better periods longer. After one year, around the time the attack took place, these people may temporarily feel worse again.

How can you tell when someone needs professional help?

You may bring up the possibility of searching professional help, if you conclude that someone still doesn't feel OK at all after one month, or if one of the following problems occurs:

- He/she behaves very differently as compared to before the attack
- He/she is not able to work, to look after the children or to do the housekeeping.
- He/she is very tensed and touchy, has sleeping problems or many nightmares.
- He/she keeps having returning thoughts or intrusive memories of the attack.
- He/she is on drugs or drinks too much.
- He/she stopped to enjoy anything at all.
- Relations with the partner, good friends and family are under heavy pressure since the attack.

How can you find professional help after a terrorist attack?

There are many different ways to find help. It is important to find a caretaker specialized in helping people who experienced critical incidents and/or who lost someone in such circumstances.

Victims or their families, who don't live in Belgium, may contact the embassy or a victim support organization in their country. Within Europe, you can find more information about these organizations on the following website: victimsupport.eu

You can find more specific and updated information on the website of the Crisis Center : www.crisiscenter.be

How do children react to critical incidents?

Children can show various emotional and physical reactions after a critical incident. These are normal reactions to an abnormal event. Possible reactions are sleeping difficulties, (over-) active behaviour, bed-wetting, physical complaints, fatigue, excessive playing, asking questions or talking a lot about the attack.

How a child will react, depends on his/her age, development and character.

Most children and teenagers will show one or more of these reactions after the attack. Most children recover within a few weeks. Only a minority will have persistent complaints.

What can adults do to help their children?

- Make your children feel safe.
- Let them know you will not let them down.
- Provide a safe and preferably known environment, surrounded by people they know.
- Pick up your usual daily activities as much as possible. This gives children something to hold on to and it favours peace and order within your family.
- Do not let them watch TV all the time, where images of the attack are being repeated constantly. Switch off your TV and do something you and your children enjoy.
- Reassure your children and give them extra emotional support. Explain that their feelings are an obvious and normal consequence of the attack.
- Tell your child that the authorities, the police, fire brigades and hospitals do everything they can. You can also explain that people from other parts of the country or from all over the world will come and help if necessary.
- If you are afraid, angry or revengeful, your child may be so too. It is important that you remain as calm as possible. Especially for small children, the parents' reactions are very important.

Source: Stichting Impact



federal public service

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