



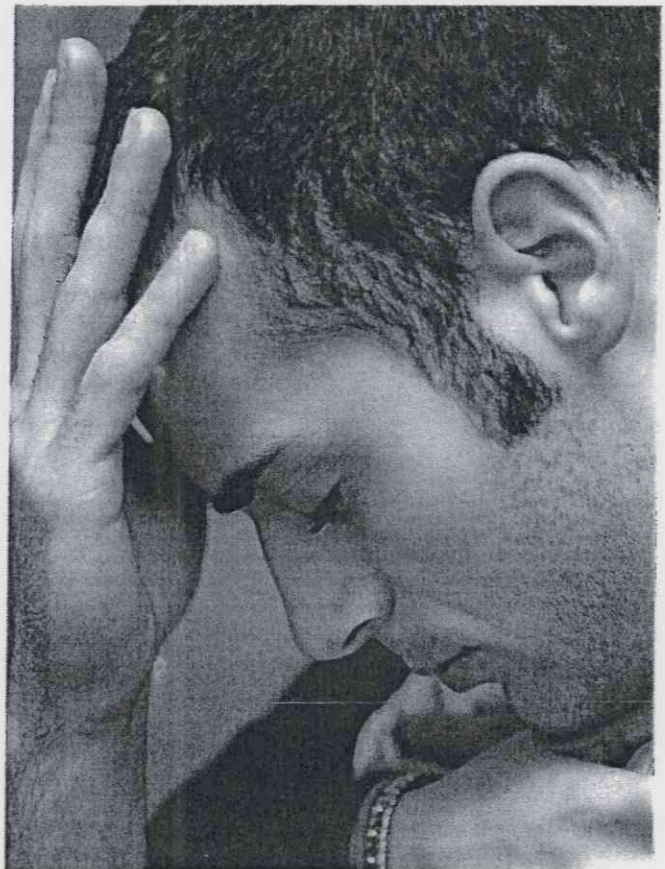
Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: COPING WITH RETRAUMATIZATION

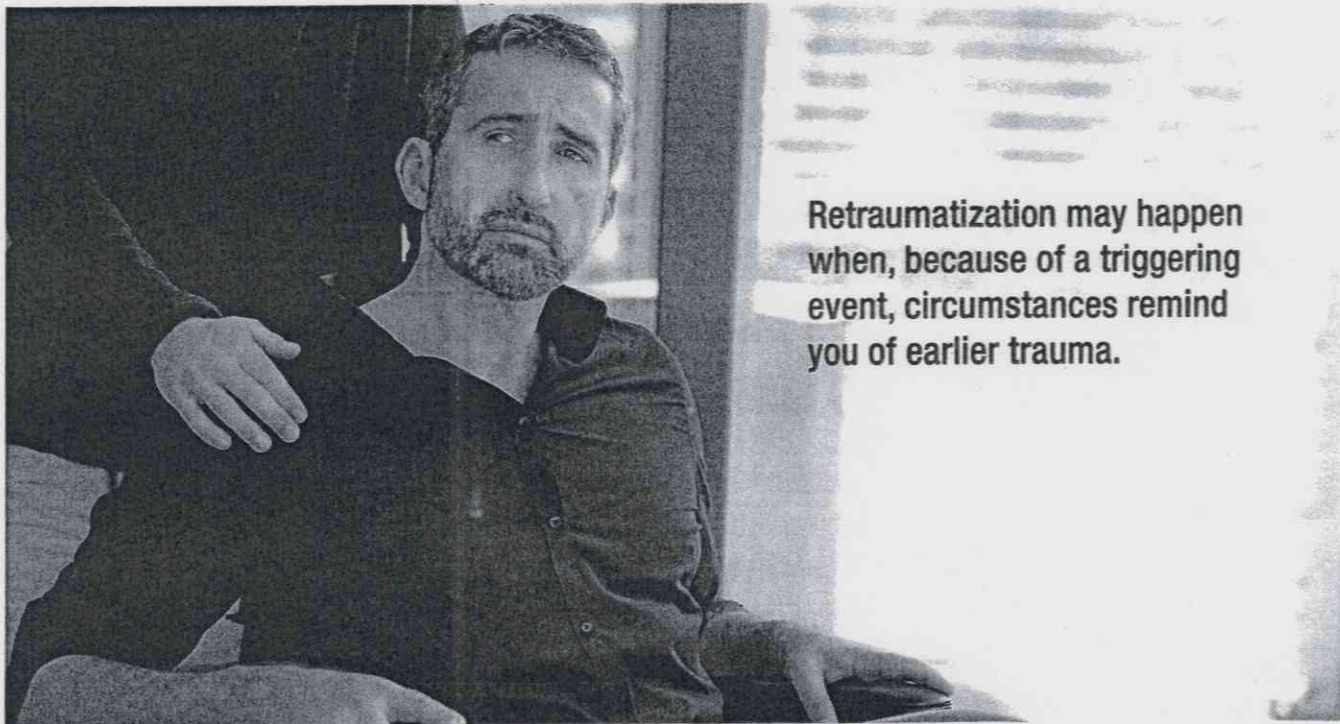
Introduction

According to National Comorbidity Survey data, more than half of men and women had experienced one or more traumas over the course of their lives, with experience of a natural disaster the second most common trauma type (Kessler et al., 1999). For some, traumatic stress reactions to a new event can feel as intense as they were when the original event occurred. This is known as retraumatization. Retraumatization is reliving stress reactions experienced as a result of a traumatic event when faced with a new, similar incident. However, as the result of the passing of time many people do not realize the stress they are experiencing is related to an earlier trauma in their lives. A current experience is subconsciously associated with the original trauma, reawakening memories and reactions, which can be distressing. This type of reaction is common and survivors should realize there are steps that can be taken to manage or relieve symptoms.

This tip sheet covers signs and symptoms of retraumatization, as well as how to know if you may benefit from more help and guidance on how to manage it. The tip sheet also lists resources for support and identifies ways you can build resilience, which is your ability to tap into your skills and access the resources around you when you are going through stressful experiences.

Most survivors of a disaster or other traumatic event are able to work through their traumatic experiences, return to their regular activities, and enjoy their lives. Some people, however, experience retraumatization and could benefit from recognizing trauma symptoms, learning how to manage them, and seeking additional help as needed. If you are experiencing retraumatization and need additional help, try using some of the recommendations noted in this tip sheet, or see the Helpful Resources section of this tip sheet for information about locating a trauma-informed professional.





Retraumatization may happen when, because of a triggering event, circumstances remind you of earlier trauma.

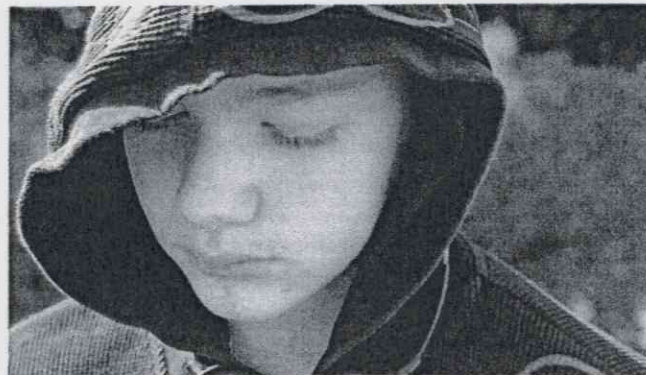
Triggering Events

A triggering event is something that immediately reminds you, your family, or your community of a fear that was experienced during a previous traumatic event, such as a disaster. Retraumatization may happen when, because of a triggering event, circumstances remind you of earlier trauma.

Here are some examples of triggering events that may contribute to retraumatization:

- Anniversary dates or news stories of similar traumatic incidents
- Similar disasters, such as a tornado, hurricane, earthquake, flood, wildfire, or the threat of these disasters
- Events such as an oil spill, mass shooting, or terrorist attack
- Distressing events reported by the media, such as car accidents, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Witnessing a traumatic event or hearing about one that happens to someone else

If you repeatedly experience stress reactions to these events, you may benefit from trauma-informed care to help you overcome retraumatization.



Risk Factors for Retraumatization

There are risk factors that can help you determine the likelihood of experiencing retraumatization. Knowing them can help you determine your risk for retraumatization as well as help you prepare to address potential signs and symptoms of distress. The following are risk factors:

- Having a high frequency of life trauma, such as abuse or neglect
- Being emotionally disconnected from or not feeling love and support from others, such as family members, peers, colleagues, friends, or other loved ones
- Living or working in unsafe situations, such as combat zones or other dangerous environments



- Using unhealthy coping styles, such as practicing avoidance or being in denial of past traumatic events, mismanaging stress (e.g., misusing alcohol, prescription medication, or illegal substances)
- Having a lack of economic and social supports or a lack of access to health and mental health care services

Retraumatization Signs and Symptoms

If you have survived a traumatic experience, you can relive it in any of the following ways:

Thoughts

- Negative thoughts that are associated with fear or other emotions experienced during the trauma
- Flashbacks and nightmares
- Trouble concentrating
- Dissociation (separation of normally related parts of awareness, such as thoughts, perceptions, memories, and identity)

Physical Signs and Symptoms

- Feeling “on edge,” very anxious and tense, or easily startled
- Trouble falling or staying asleep

- Significant changes in appetite and/or weight
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Experiencing strong reactions to triggers (e.g., fast breathing and heartbeat, sweating)

Behaviors

- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Increasing intake of alcohol and other substances following an incident
- Avoidance of people, places, and situations related to the traumatic event

Emotions

- Intense feelings of guilt, anger, fear, anxiety, horror, sadness, shame, or despair
- Intense distress in reaction to triggers, or circumstances you link to present or past trauma
- Feeling distant from other people
- Feeling unable to control your emotions, such as not being able to calm yourself down, a decreased sense of security and inability to feel love

Tips for Managing and Developing Resilience for Retraumatization

Retraumatization can feel like reopening a wound that has not quite healed. Once you recognize that you are experiencing retraumatization, you may wish to consider dedicating time and effort to your recovery from the traumatic event. The following suggestions can help you manage retraumatization:

- Appreciate the impact of the original trauma. Do not underestimate what you have been through, but also recognize that you are strong and able to recover.
- Understand how and why the event happened.
- Connect with people who understand and help you through trigger events.
- Ensure that you have a support system that is easily accessible and consists of people who know, accept, and care for you.

- Develop effective coping skills (e.g., stress management, self-care, and social support, especially peer support).
- Have a self-care plan that includes strategies for building resilience (e.g., get regular exercise, set aside quiet time for meditation or relaxation).
- Practice your spiritual beliefs or reach out to a faith leader for support.
- Seek care from a trained, trauma-informed provider who can recognize your retraumatization symptoms and offer evidence-based treatment and guidance.



Hope for Your Future

If you experience retraumatization, you may feel discouraged, but remember you can take steps toward feeling better and returning to a full and satisfying life. The past will always be with you, but you can learn new ways to manage triggers, trauma, and stress.

Most importantly, understand that your perceptions can affect your reactions. Be patient with yourself, and keep in mind that people recover from all kinds of setbacks. Take the opportunity to take control of your reactions and your life by determining the best ways to recover.

References

- Kessler, R. C., Sonnega, A., Bromet, E., Hughes, M., Nelson, C. B., & Breslau, N. N. (1999). Epidemiological risk factors for trauma and PTSD. In R. Yehuda (Ed.), *Risk factors for PTSD*. (pp. 23–59). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.



Helpful Resources

Hotlines

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990 (English and español)

SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746

SMS (español): "Hablamos" al 66746

TTY: 1-800-846-8517

Website (English): <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

Website (español): <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol>

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and español)

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free (English): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Toll-Free (español): 1-888-628-9454

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

Website (English): <https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Website (español): <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/>

Treatment Locator

Behavioral Health Treatment Facility Locator

Website: <https://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

Trauma-Related Resources

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University

Phone: 301-295-2470

Email: cstinfo@usuhs.mil

Website: <https://www.cstsonline.org>

National Center for Child Traumatic Stress

Phone: 310-235-2633

Phone: 919-682-1552

Website: <http://www.nctsn.org>

National Center for Trauma-Informed Care and Alternatives to Seclusion and Restraint (NCTIC)

Toll-Free: 1-866-254-4819

Email: NCTIC@NASMHPD.org

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic>

SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

**Note: The views, opinions, and content expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).*

Self-Care Strategies for Resilience

While not a substitute for professional care, there are plenty of simple activities anyone can do to reduce stress, encourage wellness, and restore a sense of well-being during difficult times. You know yourself best. Do what works for you and don't be afraid to try something new. Try one of these self-care activities the next time you need to take a step back, breathe, and focus on you.

Mind

- Start a gratitude journal
- Take a break
- Start a project (woodworking, paint a room)
- Try something new
- Acknowledge something you've done well lately
- Express your feelings
- Set an intention for the day
- Get creative (draw, paint, make music)
- Read a book

Body

- Go for a walk, run or bike ride
- Do some pushups
- Hit the driving range or batting cage
- Breathe slowly three times
- Take a bath
- Drink a cup of tea
- Do yoga
- Prepare your favorite meal
- Get a massage

Scenery

- Get out into nature
- Watch a sunset or sunrise
- Go to the dog park
- Frame a favorite photo and put it where you can see it
- Put on your favorite song
- Go to the movies
- Make an area of your home tidy and comfortable
- Go for a drive with the windows down
- Watch a sporting event
- Meet a friend in the park

Soul

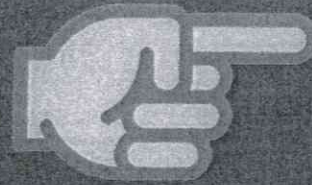
- Volunteer for a cause
- Follow social media that makes you feel good (and filter out the rest)
- Set boundaries for yourself
- Call a friend
- Ask for help (or a hug)
- Tell someone you love them
- Leave work on time (to rest and restore)
- Write a poem



The 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique

Ease your state of mind in stressful moments.

Acknowledge **5** things that you can see around you.

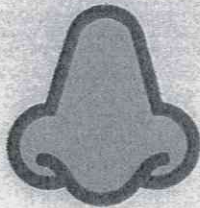


Acknowledge **4** things that you can touch around you.

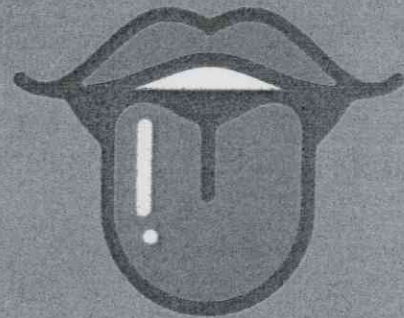


Acknowledge **3** things that you can hear around you.

Acknowledge **1** thing that you can taste around you.



Acknowledge **2** things that you can smell around you.



#QuitMonday

QUIT
& *STAY QUIT*
MONDAY

Mental Health Resources for Flood Recovery

The Vermont Department of Mental Health

Going through another round of flooding, especially on the anniversary of last year's disaster, can be deeply retraumatizing. While physical recovery is important, mental recovery is crucial too. You don't need to be directly affected by the floods to experience their mental health impacts. The following resources are available to assist you during this challenging time.

Who to Call:

****Starting Over Strong Vermont** Helps with disaster recovery through community outreach and mental health services. Dial 2-1-1 to connect with outreach workers and resources.

****988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** Call or text 988 for immediate support from trained crisis counselors who can offer emotional support and local resources.

****Vermont Mobile Crisis** Vermont mobile crisis teams provide in-person support and crisis intervention. Dial 988 to reach your local community mental health centers.

****Pathways Vermont Support Line** Call or text 833-852-2557 for confidential, non-judgmental peer support for Vermonters 18 and older. Available 24/7.

The SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline: Call or text 1-800-985-5990 for free, confidential crisis counseling available 24/7, on all days of the year

****Denotes Vermont-Based Resources****

For more information on flooding resources, tips for coping, visit mentalhealth.vermont.gov/flood or scan the QR code:



Contact your local county Designated Agency

Designated Agencies provide mental health care in your local communities, they are ready and available to provide you with support.

Clara Martin Center (Orange): 802-728-4466

Counseling Service of Addison County (Addison): 802-388-6751

Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (Windham & Windsor): 802-886-4500

Howard Center (Chittenden): 802-488-7777

Lamoille County Mental Health Services (Lamoille): 802-635-7174

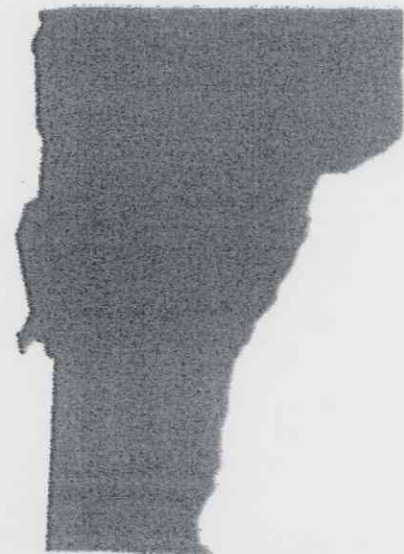
Northeast Kingdom Human Services (Caledonia, Essex, Orleans): 802-748-3181

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (Franklin, Grand Isle): 802-524-6554

Rutland Mental Health Services (Rutland): 802-775-2381

United Counseling Service of Bennington County (Bennington): 802-442-5491

Washington County Mental Health Services (Washington): 802-479-4083



Tips for Coping During Flood Recovery

The Vermont Department of Mental Health

Emotional distress can happen before and after a disaster, and people can experience a wide range of emotions during these times. There's no right or wrong way to feel—it's natural to feel anxious, scared, sad, or helpless when recovering from a disaster. The sights and sounds of the flooding, and even just waiting for it to happen, can bring back a lot of old emotions and memories. However, it's important to find healthy ways to cope when these events happen. Coping strategies include preparation, self-care, and identifying support systems.

Take care of yourself. Try to eat healthy, avoid using alcohol and drugs, and get some exercise when you can—even a walk around the block and deep breathing can make a difference to relieve stress.

Reach out to friends and family. Talk to someone you trust about how you are doing. If you have children, talk to them. They may feel scared, angry, sad, worried, and confused. Let them know it's okay to talk about what's on their mind. Role model healthy coping.

Limit your consumption of news. We live in a society where the news is available to us 24 hours a day via television, radio, and the Internet. The constant replay of news stories about a disaster or traumatic event can increase stress and anxiety and make some people relive the event over and over. Reduce the amount of news you watch and/or listen to.

Get enough "good" sleep. Some people have difficulty falling asleep after a disaster or wake up throughout the night. If you have trouble sleeping, only go to bed when you are ready to sleep, avoid using cell phones or laptops in bed, and avoid drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed. If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing what's on your mind in a journal or on a sheet of paper.

Establish and maintain a routine. Try to eat meals at regular times and put yourself on a sleep schedule to ensure an adequate amount of rest. Include a positive or fun activity in your schedule that you can look forward to each day or week.

Avoid making major life decisions. Doing things like switching jobs or careers can already be stressful and are even harder to adjust to directly after a disaster.

Understand there will be changes. Disasters can destroy homes, schools, and places of business and worship and can disrupt the lives of people living in affected areas for a long time. Sometimes, people lose loved ones or experience injuries, both physical and mental, that may last a lifetime. Some people may also experience a temporary or permanent loss of employment. For children, attending a new or temporary school may result in being separated from peers, or after-school activities may be disrupted.

Take care of pets or get outside into nature when it's safe. Nature and animals can help us to feel better when we are down. See if you can volunteer at a local animal shelter—they may need help after a disaster. Once it's safe to return to public parks or natural areas, find a quiet spot to sit in or go for a hike.

Know when to ask for help. Signs of stress can be normal, short-term reactions to any of life's unexpected events—not only after surviving a disaster, but also after a death in the family, the loss of a job, or a breakup. It's important to pay attention to what's going on with you or with someone you care about, because what may seem like "everyday stress" can actually be: depression (including the thoughts of suicide), anxiety, or alcohol/drug abuse.

Starting Over Strong
VERMONT



MARY ZENTARA
SOS Flood Counselor

(802) 274-9930
mary.zentara@nkhs.net



For caring support in an
emotional, mental health,
or substance use crisis

Available 24/7/365

In Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties, call:

1-800-649-0118

or 988

988

**SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE**

Call · Chat · Text

Help is here,
24 Hours a Day
7 Days a Week



NKHS
Northeast Kingdom Human Services

We're
All About
Being
Human!

If you or someone you know is
struggling with a mental
health crisis, call or text **988**.

or chat

988lifeline.org

