



**West Coast Health**  
Community Wellbeing Services

# **Coping after a Traumatic Event**

**A booklet of reactions, feelings  
and tips for you.**

**NEED TO TALK?**



**free call or text  
any time**

# Common, normal reactions to a traumatic event

Emotional	
<b>Shock</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disbelief</li> <li>• Unreal and dreamlike</li> <li>• Numbness</li> <li>• Slow realisation of what has happened</li> </ul>	<b>Mood swings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changeable moods for no apparent reason</li> <li>• Feelings of depression, anxiety, irritability, tearfulness or anger</li> </ul>
<b>Fears</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of damage to yourself or death</li> <li>• Of the event happening again</li> <li>• Of intense vulnerability</li> <li>• Of being alone</li> <li>• Of breaking down or losing control</li> </ul>	<b>Anger</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towards those who caused or allowed the event to happen</li> <li>• At the injustice and the senselessness of it all</li> <li>• At the shame and indignities</li> <li>• At the lack of understanding by others</li> <li>• At being singled out – why me?</li> <li>• Generalised anger and irritability</li> </ul>
<b>Anxiety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About the place or reminders of the event</li> <li>• About the dark</li> <li>• About being alone</li> <li>• About crowded places</li> <li>• About similar surroundings to where the event occurred</li> </ul>	<b>Shame</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others</li> <li>• For not having reacted as you would have wished</li> <li>• For being made to feel vulnerable, powerless or out of control</li> </ul>
<b>Sadness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the loss of the belief that the world is a safe and predictable place</li> </ul>	<b>Guilt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About not doing anything to stop it</li> <li>• About the relief that you were not directly involved</li> <li>• About not being there</li> <li>• About not having done enough to prevent it</li> </ul>



Behavioural	Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in level of sexual desire</li> <li>• Change of appetite/drinking/smoking habits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• Difficulty remembering, especially parts of the event</li> <li>• “If only” questions e.g. “If only... I hadn’t given him so much... I hadn’t taken the day off”</li> <li>• Questions about whether you did the right thing</li> <li>• “What if” questions</li> <li>• Attempts to shut out thoughts or memories of the incident</li> </ul>
<b>Apprehension</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More easily startled</li> <li>• Generally agitated physically and mentally</li> <li>• More aware of loud noises</li> <li>• Heightened awareness of your environment</li> </ul>	<b>Confusion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because the world has changed for you</li> <li>• Because of unfamiliar feelings</li> <li>• Because something from the past is troubling you again (it is not unusual for unresolved issues from past events to surface at a time like this)</li> </ul>
<b>Sleep disturbances</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking early due to repetitive thoughts or increased anxiety</li> </ul>	<b>Flashbacks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At unpredictable times and places</li> </ul>
<b>Avoidance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of situations that remind you of the event</li> <li>• Of being alone or being in crowded places</li> <li>• Of the place where the event occurred</li> </ul>	

Physical	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tiredness</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Palpitations</li> <li>• Shaking</li> <li>• Difficulty in breathing</li> <li>• Choking in the throat and chest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Diarrhoea or constipation</li> <li>• Muscle tension that may lead to pain e.g. headaches, neck and back aches, menstrual disorders, chest pain</li> </ul>

# What can I do?

☑ **Give yourself time:** It takes weeks or months to accept what has happened and to learn to live with it. You need to grieve for your loss.

☑ **Be involved with others:** It can help to spend time with others who have been through the same experience as you.

☑ **Talk it over:** Let yourself think about the trauma and talk about it with others. If you cry when you talk, it's natural and usually helpful. Take things at a pace that you feel comfortable with.

☑ **Take some time for yourself:** At times you may want to be alone or just with those close to you. Sometimes you will want to be with other people, but not to talk about what has happened. This can also be part of the healing process.

☑ **Get into a routine:** Even if you don't feel much like eating, try to have regular meals and to eat a balanced diet. Taking some exercise can help - but start gently.

☑ **Take care:** After a trauma, people are more likely to have accidents. Be careful around the home and when you are driving.

☑ **Do not:** bottle up your feelings; take on too much; make major life changes; think you are abnormal, use excessive alcohol or other drugs to help you cope.

**Children** react in a variety of ways, depending on their age:

- Become easily upset, cry or whine more often
- Get angry, act out or get into trouble
- Be afraid to sleep alone, have nightmares or difficulty falling asleep
- Be afraid to be left alone or out of their parent's sight
- Withdrawal, aggressive behaviours (fighting, hitting, etc.), trouble at school, problems separating from parents or going to sleep may mean they need extra help.

Family and friends will probably be able to see you through this difficult time. However, you may need to seek additional help (e.g. from your GP or phone help line) if:

- you have no one to share your feelings with
- you can't handle your feelings and feel overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety, or nervousness
- you feel that you are not returning to normal after six-eight weeks
- you have nightmares and cannot sleep
- you are getting on badly with those close to you
- you stay away from other people more and more
- your work is suffering
- those around you suggest you seek help
- you have accidents

## Where to Find Support

### ***Local free counselling services:***

☺ Most GP practices now have **Health Improvement Practitioners (HIPS) and Health Coaches** available across the West Coast who you can see for free at the practice for wellbeing support and strategies. You can contact the clinic reception directly to book an appointment with a HIP or Health Coach, you do not need to go through your GP.

☺ **West Coast Health 03 768 6182 (freephone 0800 004 696)** Mon-Fri 8am – 5pm

[www.westcoasthealth.nz](http://www.westcoasthealth.nz)

Primary Health Brief Intervention Counselling Programme. Counsellors can help with relieving anxiety and depression, managing stressful situations and understanding change including loss and grief using specific therapies to help you with problem-solving and different ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. They can provide information, advice and support about healthy lifestyle helping you increase resilience and satisfaction with life.

Referrals via GP Practices/Rural Clinics West Coast wide.

☎ **Puāwaitanga 0800 782 999** (Mon-Sun 9am-9pm)

Puāwaitanga is a free counselling phone service to support you to improve your situation and wellbeing along with an online portal for self help and guidance between sessions. Some suggestions of things you may want to discuss and explore could be low mood, anxiety, grief and loss, addictions, lack of identity, relationship issues, low self-esteem and low confidence. Available for people living on the West Coast from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2025.

☺ **Poutini Waiora 0800 333 170** Mon-Fri 8.30am – 5pm

[www.poutiniwaiora.co.nz](http://www.poutiniwaiora.co.nz)

Kaupapa Maori Health and Social Service provider that delivers care to whanau across Te Tai O Poutini. Counselling for whanau regarding a broad range of issues including depression, anxiety, grief, relationship and family violence counselling.

☺ **Workplace Support/Employment Assistance Programme** *(For employees only)*

If you are employed, most employers will offer free counselling through an Employment Assistance Programme. Issues do not have to be related to work, often extend to immediate family members and is entirely confidential, your employer is not informed of your access to this service nor what was discussed. Your workplace should have details of the agency they use and how to contact displayed in a common room notice board or a workplace intranet site.

☺ **Rural Support Trust 0800 287 077** available 7 days a week 8am – 9pm



[www.rural-support.org.nz](http://www.rural-support.org.nz)

West Coast Rural Support Trust is about rural people helping rural people and communities during difficult times. Its coordinators are skilled in assisting rural people through adverse events such as flooding or storms, financial, animal welfare, personal crisis or any other type of rural challenges. The Trust is well connected with rural networks, Civil Defence, local and central government agencies, making the Trust well placed to get things done.



## **National 24-hour helplines:**

*There are also helplines available if you need to talk to someone now as feeling overwhelmed. Helpline are staffed by trained counsellors, mental health professionals or volunteers:*

**☎ 1737 Need to Talk** free call or text. The 1737 team provides brief counselling support, identifying key issues, helping plan some steps to take and if needed, connecting with more comprehensive support services available in your area. [www.1737.org.nz](http://www.1737.org.nz)

**☎ Anxiety New Zealand Trust 0800 ANXIETY (0800 269 4389)**. Fully trained volunteers providing brief interventions for anxiety management, support and advice. [www.anxiety.org.nz](http://www.anxiety.org.nz)

**☎ Depression Helpline 0800 111 757** or free txt 4202. Call the Depression Helpline to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions. [www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)

**☎ Lifeline 0800 543 354**. We're here to assist with emotional issues, anxiety, depression, relationships, family problems, abuse, work, finances, and more whenever you need it. Our counsellors undergo in-depth training and supervision, providing a caring and professional service to a wide range of people in need.

**☎ Samaritans 0800 726 666**. Confidential, non judgmental & non religious support. Call anytime if you are experiencing loneliness, depression, despair, distress or suicidal feelings. Our phones are operated by volunteers from the community for the community.

**☎ Asian Family Services 0800 862 342** Available Mon-Fri, 9am – 8pm, or text 832 9am – 5pm

Asian Helpline provides nationwide free and confidential services. Our helpline is available in eight languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese, Hindi and English.

**☎ 0800 OLA LELEI (0800 652 535)** Available Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.00pm.

FREE national Pacific helpline anyone can call if they are feeling worried, stressed or concerned about anything and need someone to talk to, for help and support. The Ola Lelei team speaks Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori and English. All conversations are confidential.

**☎ Victim Support 0800 842 846** (if the traumatic event was a crime)

Victim support is a community organisation with a network of caring and skilled volunteers across New Zealand. We can help you deal with the emotional and practical effects of the crime, and provide information to help you understand the legal process. Our service is free, personal and confidential. <https://victimsupport.org.nz>

### *For Youth:*

**☎ 0800 WHATS UP (0800 942 8787) Available Mon-Sun 11am-11pm**

**Website:** [www.whatsup.co.nz](http://www.whatsup.co.nz)

**For youth aged 5 to 19 years**

Offers phone or webchat with trained counsellors, a safe space for young people to talk about anything at all. You can ask to speak to a counsellor that you can relate to and ask to speak with the same person each time. There is also a website with a range of age appropriate resources and for whanau to help you deal with common emotional or social difficulties.

**📱 SPARX 0508 4 SPARX (0508 477 279) or free text 3110 Available 24/7**

**Website:** [www.sparx.org.nz](http://www.sparx.org.nz)

**For youth aged 12-19 years**

Free to use online cognitive behavioural therapy site for young people to help them understand and manage feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. Uses a 7 level fantasy computer game that teaches you skills that you can apply to your own life. The website also has information for a young person's family and whanau, and where to get further help if required.

**☎ Youthline (0800 376 633) or free text 234 Available 24/7**

**Webchat also available between 10am-10pm**

**Website:** [www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz)

**For youth aged 12-24 years**

Comprehensive information and self-assessment tools to encourage young people's personal development and to support them in their time of need. The information covers a wide range of issues from dealing with relationship and emotions to creating and thriving in communities. Utilises a range of tools including online and phone counselling, quizzes, chat forums and training options. They also give advice on how whanau and friends can support the young person who is experiencing a mental health issue.





## Free Online Programmes/Apps

 **Just A Thought (NZ)** *(for ages 16 and over)*

<https://justathought.co.nz>


A New Zealand designed online website that uses CBT to address common areas of mental distress; generalised anxiety, social anxiety, panic, pre & post natal wellbeing and insomnia. There is also a Staying on Track guide to support your wellbeing as you navigate through a stressful situation. The website plans on adding more courses as they are developed. The courses are self-paced, designed to take 6-8 weeks with education, tools and skills and activities to do to test those skills.

 **Thinkladder App (NZ)** iTunes & Google Play

<https://thinkladder.com>

A New Zealand developed app that offers self-help based on CBT techniques to help you become more self-aware of limiting or negative beliefs or thinking patterns such as perfectionism, people pleasing, self-criticism and many others. The user chooses the theme to explore, understand the attached difficult emotional responses, automatic thoughts and habits that have kept you stuck. Thinkladder helps you gain clarity and insight, alternative perspectives that may resonate with you to help you think about things differently, explore your values and help you achieve your goals.

### *For Youth*

 **The Lowdown** *(For youth aged 12- 19 years)*

**Website:** [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

Website provides information for young people on how to recognise, understand and cope with symptoms of depression and anxiety. There is also information for dealing with identity issues, relationships, school life and supporting friends in need. Information is provided in various forms including videos, webpage text, online discussion forum and self help tests.

 **Headstrong App (NZ)** iTunes & Google Play *(for ages 12 – 24 years)*

[www.headstrong.org.nz](http://www.headstrong.org.nz)

App developed by the University of Auckland and Te Whatu Ora to help the young people of New Zealand enhance their mental wellbeing, using proven strategies to manage stress, resolve conflict, deal with negative thoughts and strong emotions. Sometimes young people can find it hard to ask for help or put into words what they are feeling, this app can be a safe space to start to help develop awareness and confidence.