

Managing Traumatic Stress

A 15-Card Crisis Response System

In times of crisis, people need more than one tool. They need a system.

This set of 15 cards provides practical ways to respond to difficult situations, both internally and externally.

These tools cover four areas:

Mind: How you think

Body: Regulating your body and emotions

Action: What you do

Support: Who and what supports you

Each card adds something different. No single tool works in every moment or phase of a crisis. Use as needed.

Together, they cover many of the most important ways people cope with stress, uncertainty, and crisis.

Over time, these tools build flexibility and resilience-the ability to adapt, recover, and keep moving forward through challenge.



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UNDERSTANDING YOUR RESPONSE



Our bodies react immediately when something traumatic happens, without asking us first. That's how humans are designed. There's nothing wrong with you, even if you feel different after something like this.



When we feel safe enough, our bodies and minds can gradually return to balance. This may take some time or work. Let's be patient with ourselves and have self-compassion.



For now, we can ask ourselves, "what do I need right now?"



We can't just stop the trauma symptoms that traumatic events create, but we can show up to our bodies and minds with wisdom, we can ask for help, and we can try healthy ways to cope.

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MOVE & DO



When you feel stuck, restless, or overwhelmed, it helps to MOVE or DO something.



We can shake out that energy, walk back and forth, or use simple physical movement to release stress from your body.



Doing something, even something small, can help us feel more in control, calmer, and present. We can shift from feeling helpless to feeling capable by helping someone nearby, reading a book to a child, tidying up, or making a tea.

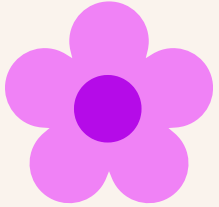


Taking action helps us find control within chaos and uncertainty. We can generate a sense of agency and the power to move forward, one step at a time.

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BREATH AND SLOW DOWN



1) Breathe in from your nose for 4 seconds (like smelling a flower).



2) Hold your breath for 2 seconds.



3) Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds (like gently blowing a candle).



4) Do this for 2 minutes straight and notice how your body feels after this exercise.



5) Repeat anytime you need.

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DROP YOUR ANCHOR



When scary thoughts take over or won't let you sleep, you can drop your anchor.



Imagine your mind is like a ship in a storm. Without an anchor, it gets pulled away by the waves and winds. With an anchor, it stays grounded.



To drop your anchor, pause and focus on what is happening right now around you.



Notice your body's weight on the chair or bed, the sound of a nearby fan, colors in the room, the warmth of the sun on your skin, or any physical sensation that comes up in this moment.



This helps remind your mind that you are HERE, and you are safe right now.

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GIVE PEOPLE A TOOL

When somebody is scared or overwhelmed, telling them things like "Don't be scared" isn't enough. This doesn't explain **how** to manage fear.



TRY THIS INSTEAD

Acknowledge

Let them know you see their struggle.
“I can see this is hard.”

Ask A Simple Question

“What do you think can help you right now?”
This question helps a person turn inwards to see what their needs are.

Offer Choices

If the person can't think of an idea on their own, offer 1-3 coping methods and let them choose. We prefer for people to feel in charge and not be told what to do.



We can't force people to feel calm, but we can help them take small steps towards finding it.

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WHO TO BELIEVE?



Q: What if after a trauma event your body feels unsafe, but trusted others say that it *is* safe?
Who to believe?

A: When something feels dangerous, your body's alarm system goes off, even when you aren't in danger anymore.



This alarm system is fast and automatic, designed to protect you from potential harm. Because of this, you can *feel* unsafe even when you *are* safe.

This is normal and common after a scary event.



Gently act as if it is safe again.



Take small, brave steps back to your routine.



With time and support, your body will gradually calm down and follow your lead.



Feelings are real but they are not always facts.

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HEALING TOGETHER



One of the most powerful things during hard times is **connection to others**.

Create opportunities for connection with friends, family, or neighbors. Connection provides togetherness, hope, and strength.



Even small moments of connection help:
A short call, a message, or simply sitting next to someone quietly.



Ask a friend for a daily check-in, even just to say “good morning”.



Reach out to someone you trust. Accept support when friends offer.



You are not a burden to people who care about you.



Connecting to others changes how we feel, even in life’s hardest moments.

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SPEAKING TO KIDS



Be honest with children after traumatic events. It's better they hear from you than from others.



When we lie or pretend nothing happened, our children catch us and lose trust.



Choose what to share, using calm, clear words. Think about how your child might react, and how you can support them.



Match your message to your child's age.



By acting calmly, parents lead their family throughout a crisis and broadcast stability.



We can't totally shield children from difficult news, but we can be the best ambassadors to give it over and help them cope.

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ROUTINE & PURPOSE



During a crisis, normal routines are disrupted. Without structure, we can feel unsettled and disoriented.



Try to rebuild simple routines, even in difficult conditions.



Keep regular times for eating, sleeping, and spending time with others.

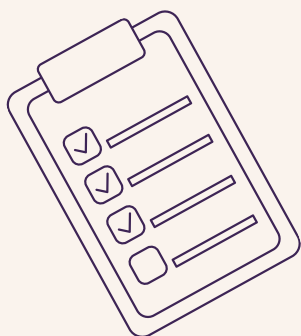


Create a basic daily rhythm. If usual activities aren't possible, adapt by using what you have.

Focus on small, meaningful tasks: Helping at home, connecting with others, or doing something that gives you purpose.



Routine stabilizes us, while action restores control and purpose.



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PREPARE FOR CRISIS



During a crisis, the systems we rely on are tested.



Like buildings designed to sway in strong winds, systems that are flexible are more likely to hold.



We can build that flexibility in advance.



Prepare basic supplies: food, water, and medical items.



Learn skills like first aid.
Build connections with people you can rely on.
Create an emergency fund.



Practice handling small challenges on purpose to strengthen your ability to adapt.



Practical preparation strengthens our system.
A stronger system increases stability, reduces stress, and allows us to be mentally resilient.

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COURAGE



Fear is a normal response to danger and the unknown.



Courage is choosing to act anyway and do what matters most. Anyone can act courageously in difficult moments.



Waiting for fear to disappear or overthinking for the “right moment” keeps us stuck.



Courage means moving toward what is hard, uncertain, or painful when the situation demands it.



Courage is not the absence of fear. It is **action** in the presence of fear.



Small acts of courage build strength over time and prepare us for when it matters most.



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RESILIENCE – HOW TO THINK



Resilience is a way of thinking and acting that helps us keep functioning and adapting in difficult situations.



Resilient people don't stop when things get hard.

When challenges come, they adjust and keep moving forward.



They focus on what can be done, not on what can't.



They take the next step, even when it's small.



Setbacks don't stop them.

They recover, adapt, and continue.

Resilience is choosing to keep going when things don't go your way.



Courage gets us started in the face of fear.

Resilience keeps us going when we face setbacks.

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PERSEVERANCE



Perseverance is continuing over time, even when it feels like nothing is changing. Staying committed until the end.



People who persevere don't quit before the outcome is reached. They keep showing up, even when motivation is low. Even after being knocked down before.



Resilience is how we respond to setbacks. ***Perseverance*** is how we keep going over time.

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LEADERSHIP



Leadership means taking responsibility for others and guiding them through difficult situations.



Leadership applies to many roles: parents, teachers, first responders, religious figures, and community leaders.



In difficult times, people look to someone to guide them.



Leaders show up for their people when things get hard. They stay present in uncertain times and validate people's feelings. They offer a vision for a better future and give clear direction on the next steps to take.



Anybody can lead others during hard times, and make a major impact on those around them.



Leaders don't disappear in hard moments. They become more present.

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FAITH

Faith in God gives strength when things feel out of control.



“He who trusts in God is surrounded by kindness.”
(Psalms 32)



“Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid.” (Isiah 12)



Even in the most difficult moments, our tradition teaches: "Even if a sharp sword is upon one's neck, do not stop praying for mercy" (Brachos 10).



Faith is like a staff, something a person leans on when climbing up a steep mountain. (Sichos HaRan 98). Faith has been a bedrock of strength and salvation for leaders, warriors, and ordinary people throughout history.



In moments of fear or uncertainty, turn to God immediately. Speak in simple words. “God, help me. Give me strength. Stay with me.”



Even a few honest words can bring steadiness and support.

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