

Helping Trauma Victims Heal

Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust, made the following observation during his experience in the camps: *“What we really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.”*

Caregivers can provide much needed practical, emotional and spiritual support in the following ways.

1. Be available for the victim/survivor, especially after everyone else has left.
2. Provide a physically, emotionally and spiritually safe environment for the victim or survivor.
3. Allow the victim/survivor to talk about their powerful feelings and reactions to the event. Talking allows for much needed interaction, ventilation and storytelling from the victims. Telling about the event also reduces their sense of isolation. Caregivers can validate that their feelings and reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
4. Alert survivors as to their need for good nutritious food, exercise and rest.
5. Be of *practical* service and take care of chores or tasks if necessary.
6. Encourage and use a sense of humor when it can be done sensitively.
7. Acknowledge the individual’s right to grieve. Have no expectations as to timelines in the grieving process.
8. Help individuals restore their connection to their community. This will aid in building confidence, meaning, restoration and hope for the future.
9. Allow individuals in crisis to ask questions about faith and God, and refer victims, survivors, and families to trained pastoral care counselors, chaplains, or other faith-based counselors if and when appropriate.
10. Keep in contact during birthdays, holidays and anniversary dates of the incident.
11. Encourage victims to predict and prepare for the immediate future. Different people will all have different goals. Their goals should be specific but not too hard to reach.
12. Remember and reminisce about better times and allow the individual to talk about the loss, their fears and anxieties, or talk about the deceased.
13. Some events can trigger emotional reactions related to other traumatic events in an individual’s life which may lead to a more complicated healing process. Identify trained trauma specialists in your community. Contact behavioral health resources or clinically trained pastoral care counselors that can provide assistance for short term and longer term help.