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First on scene and witnesses of road trauma

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VICTORIA • COUNSELLING, SUPPORTING & EDUCATING

The scene of a road trauma

Collisions involving motor vehicles, and other forms of transport, in which people die or are badly injured are traumatic events. It is important to be aware that you may feel traumatised if you have witnessed a collision or given assistance at the scene of a serious incident.

You may be having a range of thoughts, feelings, emotions and responses to the road trauma that are difficult for you to manage and outside the experience of family and friends. You may feel alone with your problems.

Common reactions

It is helpful to identify your reactions and know they are a normal response to a traumatic event. For example, you may be experiencing:

- Flashbacks, sleeplessness or nightmares; shock, shaking or feeling unusually cold; sensitivity to noise; wide-ranging emotions including disbelief, guilt, anger, irritability or helplessness; mental confusion; inability to concentrate on tasks; withdrawal from others or from usual activities; avoidance of situations that may trigger difficult emotions, especially the collision site.
- A preoccupation with the events; mentally replaying what you saw, heard and smelt.
- If you assisted someone as they were dying, you may be grieving from having formed a bond that only you can feel and appreciate.
- A sense of basic assumptions about the world having been shattered, that nothing is 'safe' anymore.

- Fears about driving, being a passenger, cyclist or a pedestrian on the roads; fearing for the safety of loved ones when they are on or near the road.
- Criticising and blaming yourself; questioning your actions and thinking you should have done more to prevent the collision or help at the scene.

What can help?

Please try not to be embarrassed about asking for support if and when you need it; we all need help at some time in our lives. The following ideas may be useful for you:

- Acknowledge that it is normal to have a variety of responses after having experienced a traumatic event.
- Know that recurring thoughts, flashbacks and bad dreams are common and usually decrease in frequency and intensity with time.
- Learn to practise self-care: get plenty of rest, eat regular and nutritious meals, go for walks or exercise, avoid using alcohol or drugs to numb the effects.
- Try not to increase the use of stimulants such as coffee, tea, cigarettes and caffeinated drinks.
- Take time to relax but beware of isolating yourself too much from other people.
- Try to resume a normal routine as soon as it seems right to do so.
- Find someone who is a good listener and talk about what you are thinking and how you are feeling.

Who can help?

A supportive family member or friend will often be of the greatest help at this time. However, you may find that the people around you do not understand or expect that you will quickly 'get over it'.

You may stop yourself talking about what has happened to avoid getting upset and creating social awkwardness. This is when it can be helpful to speak to someone outside of your usual network, such as your general practitioner or a psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker or counsellor experienced in trauma and grief.

Our organisation

Road Trauma Support Services Victoria provides free counselling, information and peer support programs to more than 3,000 Victorians impacted by road trauma every year.

We are committed to educating the community and raising public awareness about road trauma and how it affects people's lives. We do this by addressing the attitudes and behaviours of road users through education.

Our counsellors

Our counsellors are specially trained to help people manage the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with road trauma.

Counselling sessions are free of charge, confidential and unlimited in number for anyone affected by a collision on the roads (or involving any public transport), whenever this may have occurred. Sessions may be conducted face-to-face or by telephone.

Our clients include bereaved families, friends and colleagues; injured people and carers; drivers and passengers; and people who were first on scene – witnesses, citizens who offered assistance, and emergency service workers.

You do not need a referral to access our services. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. To make an appointment, please call **1300 367 797**.

Our community

Here are some ways to help and connect with people affected by road trauma:

- Tell your family and friends about the free counselling services at Road Trauma Support Services Victoria.
- Like us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram and Twitter, or join our mailing list.
- Join us at our annual Shine a Light on Road Safety community walk or Time for Remembering ceremony.
- Come along to our free monthly Art Therapy Group (no art/craft experience necessary).
- Get involved in shaping our future by becoming a member of Road Trauma Support Services Victoria.
- Volunteer with us.

Support our work

The trauma that results from a fatal or serious collision can happen to anyone at any time. Each dollar donated helps us to provide vital services to all Victorians who are impacted. Please consider making a donation today.

We reinvest all funds in our programs and work hard to make sure that the resources entrusted to us are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

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