

## **Coping After a Serious Road Incident: A Guide for Young People and Parents**

### **For Young People**

It's okay to feel upset, scared, or confused after witnessing a serious collision. The feelings and thoughts you're having are a normal reaction to an extraordinary, very sad and very difficult event. Most people who experience a serious collision have these feelings too, you're not alone.

There are people around you, who want to help and support you.

This guide will help you understand what's happening and what you can do to feel better.

### **What You Might Be Feeling:**

- Shock and disbelief: Feeling numb or like it didn't happen.
- Sadness or anger: Over what happened to those involved.
- Guilt: Even though you're not to blame, you might feel you could've done something differently.
- Flashbacks or nightmares: Memories of the collision and what you saw might keep coming back when you don't want them to.
- Trouble sleeping: Feeling restless or scared to fall asleep.
- Changes in how you feel about safety: Feeling jumpy or easily startled.

These are normal responses to trauma. They show how much your brain and body care about keeping you safe, even if it doesn't feel that way right now.

### **How Trauma Affects Your Brain:**

When you go through something scary or upsetting, your brain focuses on survival. This can make it harder to think clearly, feel calm, or forget what happened. Your brain is amazing at healing itself, and with time and the right support, these feelings will usually improve.

### **What Can Help?**

Sometimes it can feel strange or even silly to try certain things, especially when you're feeling really upset. But these things work because they help your brain and body recover from stress and trauma. Give them a try, you might be surprised by how much they help!

### **Talk to Someone You Trust**

Talking out loud helps your brain process what you've been through. When someone listens, it signals to your brain that you're not alone and that you're safe.

- You don't have to talk about everything at once - start small.
- Find someone you trust, like a parent, teacher, or friend.
- Even saying, "I'm having a tough time" is a good start.

## Write It Down or Draw It Out

Writing or drawing gives your brain a chance to release what it's holding onto. It's like 'emptying your mental backpack' so it feels lighter.

- Write a journal entry about how you're feeling.
- Draw what your emotions feel like—use colours or shapes.
- Write a letter to yourself or someone you trust, even if you don't send it.

## Move Your Body

Trauma can get 'stuck' in your body physically, making you feel tense or restless. Moving helps release this tension and lets your body know it's okay to relax.

- Go for a walk, even just around your house or garden.
- Dance to your favourite music. Try simple stretches like reaching for the ceiling or touching your toes.
- If you like sports, kick a ball or practice your aim with a ball against a wall.

## Creating a Calming Routine

Your brain loves routines because they make you feel safe and in control. Doing the same calming activities every day helps your brain associate them with relaxation.

- Pick a few things that make you feel calm, like reading, drawing, or listening to music.
- Do them around the same time each day.
- Before bed, try gentle activities like colouring, stretching, or listening to soothing sounds.

## Try Breathing Exercises

When you're stressed, your breathing can become quick and shallow, which tells your brain something is wrong. Deep, slow breaths send a message to your brain that you're safe.

- Square Breathing: Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, and hold for 4 again. Repeat and keep doing the counting, it diverts your brain's thoughts.
- Belly Breathing: Place your hands on your stomach and take deep breaths, feeling your stomach rise and fall.

## Use 'Grounding Techniques'

When you feel overwhelmed, grounding brings your focus back to the present. It reminds your brain that you're safe right now. You can do this anywhere when you feel this way.

This also helps stop the memories of what you saw taking over so you can do this every time you get a memory. It trains your brain to stop seeing those pictures.

Look around where you are and name:

- **5** things you can **see**,
- **4** things you can **touch**,
- **3** things you can **hear**,
- **2** things you can **smell**,
- **1** thing you can **taste**.

## Focus on the Basics

Taking care of your body makes it easier for your brain to heal. Eating, sleeping, and drinking water might not seem like much, but they're powerful tools for recovery.

- Eat something, even if it's small. Snacks like fruit, toast, or crackers are great.
- Drink water or tea. Staying hydrated helps your body feel better.
- Try to go to bed at the same time each night, even if it takes a while to fall asleep.

## What If It Doesn't Get Better?

For most people, these feelings slowly improve over a few weeks or a couple of months. But sometimes, you might need extra help.

Ask for support if you:

- You still feel very upset, angry, or scared after a few weeks.
- Avoid places or things that remind you of the collision.
- Feel hopeless or think about hurting yourself.

You're not alone. You can talk to your parents, teachers, a youth worker or reach out to us at Aftermath Support.

## For Parents: How to Help Your Child.

### 1. Listen Without Judgement

Encourage them to share, but don't push if they're not ready.

### 2. Provide Reassurance

Let them know their feelings are very normal in the circumstances and they will get better over time.

3. Encourage them to use these tips and tricks in this resource sheet - they really do help and have been used successfully by many adults and young people affected by fatal and serious collisions.

### 4. Watch for Signs They're Struggling

- Changes in sleep, appetite, or mood.
- Withdrawing from friends or activities.
- Using substances such as drink and/or drugs.

### 5. Seek Professional Help If Needed

Contact your GP, school counsellor, or Aftermath Support for guidance.

## Contact Us:

If you or your child need help, please reach out to Aftermath Support. We're here to listen to you and guide you through this challenging time.

For further information, help or support please contact us on 0845 634 4273 or 0151 777 2562 or e-mail: [support@aftermathsupport.org.uk](mailto:support@aftermathsupport.org.uk) or go to our website: [www.aftermathsupport.org.uk](http://www.aftermathsupport.org.uk)