

Managing Your Losses after Trauma Exposure

When a traumatic event happens to us, we experience losses of various kinds. No matter which of these losses you experience, continue to develop your self-love and self-knowledge. The more you know about yourself, your feelings, behaviors, and values, the better you will cope with loss.

Loss of Control and Power: Do you feel you have lost some control and power over your life in a way you never experienced before? Do you continue to feel helpless after the traumatic event is over? If you experience these feelings, then:

- Offer yourself compassion and forgiveness. Blaming yourself for not being in control can be common after a traumatic event. Let it go.
- Develop clear physical boundaries, especially with regard to touch. Know how much physical distance is comfortable with your intimate relationships, close friends, acquaintances, and strangers.
- Become aware of your emotional boundaries. How much of others' suffering and pain can you listen to without being drawn in yourself? Do you need to avoid being exposed to violent films or television programs? See page 54 for suggestions on boundary setting.

Loss of a Sense of Safety: Do you feel unsafe in certain places or situations that remind you of the event? Or do you feel unsafe all the time? Do you worry that your loved ones are unsafe or vulnerable? Do you feel safe in a very hazardous situation? All these reactions are related to safety. If you experience these feelings, then:

- Remember that being safe is not an "all or none" situation. It means being safe now in the present situation. Feeling safe with yourself, others, and in our world are part of safety.
- If you feel unsafe with your emotions and might even be tempted to hurt yourself in some way, use the self-care approaches mentioned on page 47. Don't isolate yourself with these feelings. Reach out to a friend, go to a favorite place, do something that calms you and helps you deal with the intensity of your emotions. If you feel suicidal or a desire to hurt yourself in some way, call 911 or a trusted person immediately. See Grounding on page 53.
- When you feel unsafe with others, even those you felt safe with before the trauma, consider seeking professional care. Join a trauma survivor group that might be available through a hospital or mental health provider, or see page 49.
- Have others help you do a reality check on your feelings of fear with others. Knowing that some of your feelings of fear are inaccurate can be a start to healing.

Loss of Trust: Do you find yourself less trusting of others? Have some of your close relationships been altered or even dissolved over your inability to trust? If you experience these feelings, then:

- Know that trust is a very fragile human quality, easily bruised and compromised by trauma.
- Take an inventory of your relationships before, during, and after the trauma (similar to the fourth step of 12 Step recovery.) Pace yourself in doing this task to avoid overwhelm.
- When you are clearer about which relationships have been ruptured most, make some decisions about which ones you might want to take steps to restore.
- Begin the slow work of rebuilding, trusting that God will walk with you on this journey.

Dena Rosenbloom, PhD, Mary Beth Williams, PhD, with Barbara E. Watkins. *Life After Trauma: A Workbook for Healing*, 2nd ed. New York, The Guilford Press, 2010.