

Self-Care Guide

Following A Criminal Act



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Preamble

Most people will be exposed, in one way or another, to at least one traumatic event in their lives. If you are reading this guide, it is likely that you are in this situation.

You probably find it quite unsettling, even panicky. You may even feel that you are losing control of your life because you do not understand the reactions you have and you no longer recognize yourself.

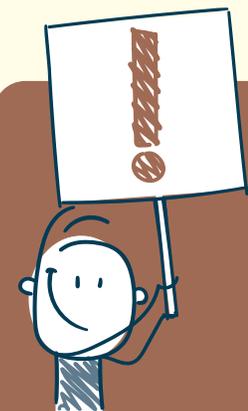
This guide is designed to help you better understand what is happening to you and to equip you in order to better deal with some of the difficulties related to the traumatic event or to alleviate them.

In the following pages, you will find various information as well as practical tools to put into action on your own.

We hope that this guide will help you to regain control of your life. **It never replaces consulting with specialized professionals**, but rather is complementary to them.

Enjoy your reading!

*One Step
at a time...*



Warning:

At any time, if reading this guide provokes an increase in your symptoms and difficulties, put it aside and discuss it with your social worker or other professional.





Better Understanding of Trauma

But what is a traumatic event?

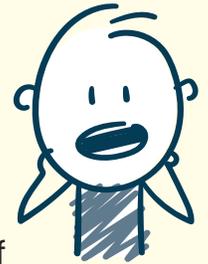
According to the Mini DSM-5¹, to be exposed to death or death threats, or serious injuries or sexual violence constitute events that are potentially traumatic. The traumatic consequences can be present if you have been exposed to such an event in one way or the other as the following:

- Having experienced the event yourself;
- Having witnessed the event first hand;
- Learning that such an event happened to a family member or a close friend;
- Being repeatedly or extremely exposed to the details of the events (exposure through electronic media does not apply unless you are exposed to it in the course of your work).

¹DSM-5: The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic Criteria for Mental Disorders. This book is the main reference book for a common language among various mental health professionals.

Possible reactions to a traumatic event

You can react in 3 different manners when exposed to a traumatic event, either: **flee, fight, or freeze.**



It may surprise you but the majority of people freeze during a traumatic event. We can do nothing about it. Our brains are made in such a way that, if our survival instinct considers that it is preferable to do nothing to ensure our security or even our survival, we will freeze. It is not a rational reaction but purely an instinctive one. In such dangerous situations, our instinct is stronger than our reason.



If there is one thing to remember after being exposed to a traumatic event, it is that your reactions are **NORMAL!** It is the event that is **UNUSUAL.**

Possible Consequences

Experiencing such an event is necessarily destabilizing. It has an impact on all spheres of life. For some people, the negative effects last only for few days whereas others might have them for a longer time, even years.

It is also possible that if you have been a victim of a criminal act –even if it is not considered a traumatic event according to the medical definition—you might experience some of the following difficulties:

Minutes or hours after the event, it is not rare to see such reactions as the following:

- State of shock
- Confusion
- Fear, insecurity
- Feeling of disgust
- Feeling of being different, of having strange reactions
- Having intrusive thoughts or dreams related to the event



In the first days and weeks:

- Repetitive and involuntary memories of the event
- Impression of reliving the event (“flashback”)
- Inability to feel positive emotions, even being more irritable and angry
- Inability to remember an important aspect of the event
- Feeling like losing track of time
- Having a strong desire to avoid everything that might remind us of the event (place, smell, emotion, physical characteristics, etc.)
- Trouble sleeping
- Hypervigilance (impression of being always on the lookout)
- Difficulty related to concentration and memory
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety
- Muscular tension



Generally, the first month after a traumatic event is the worst. Afterwards, the majority of people return to a life that is fairly similar to what it was before the event. These people will not develop post-traumatic stress disorder. For other people, certain difficulties persist or even intensify. Several problems can develop for the victims whose recovery takes longer. Here are some examples:

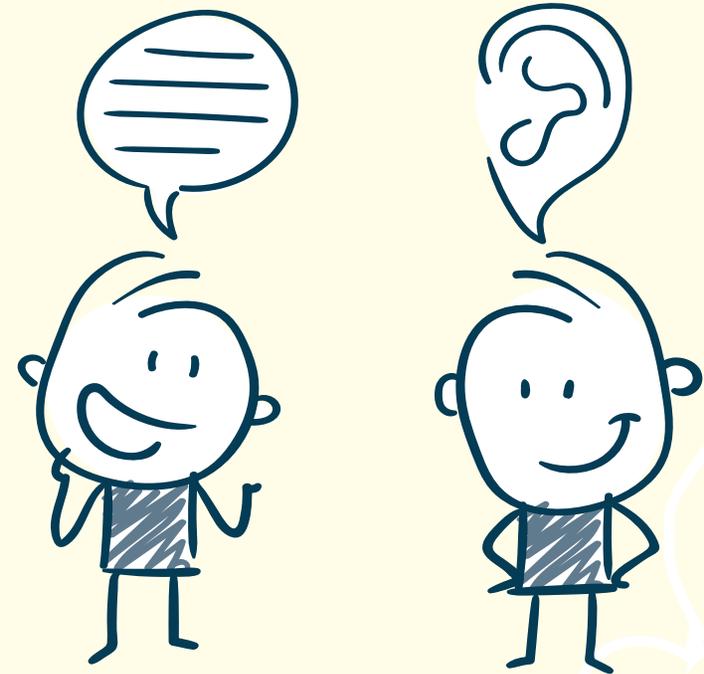
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**
- **Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, medication...)**
- **Depression**
- **Anxiety disorder**
- **Chronic pain**
- **Various health problems**

On the other hand, some people will have little reaction following the event. Some will never have any reaction while it is possible that others may have reactions later. Sometimes weeks or years can pass between the moment the events took place and the onset of post-traumatic reactions. When this happens, it is common that a triggering event has led to the onset of the difficulties.

Several factors can influence the duration of the consequences or symptoms. This means that for the same event experienced by several people at the same time, the duration and the nature of the consequences can vary greatly from one individual to another. However, the actual state of science does not permit to predict

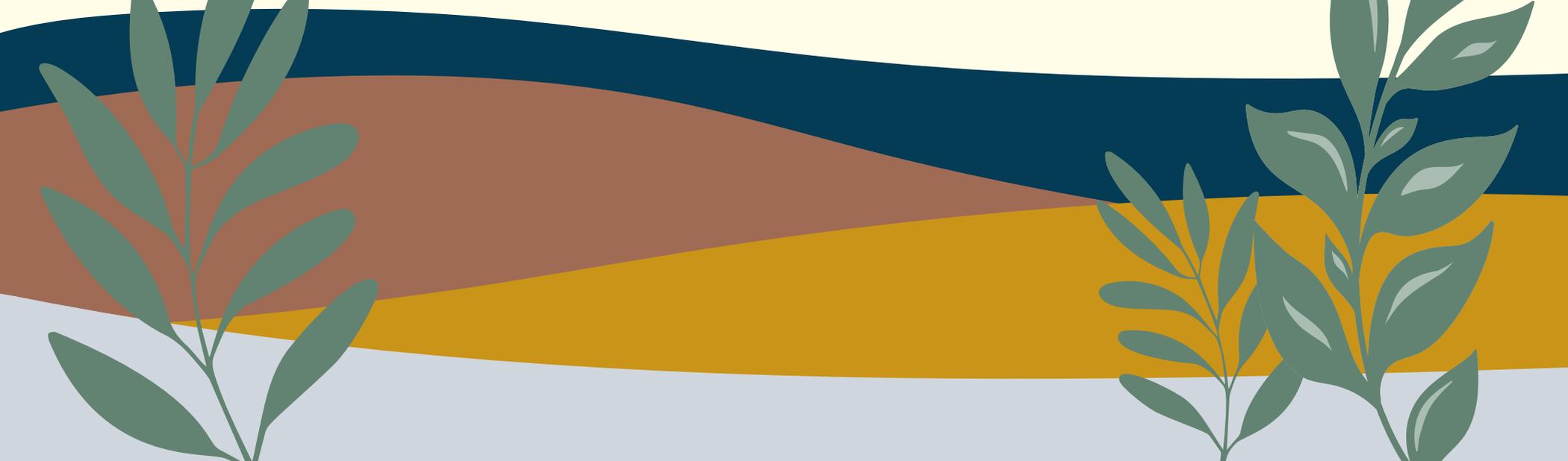
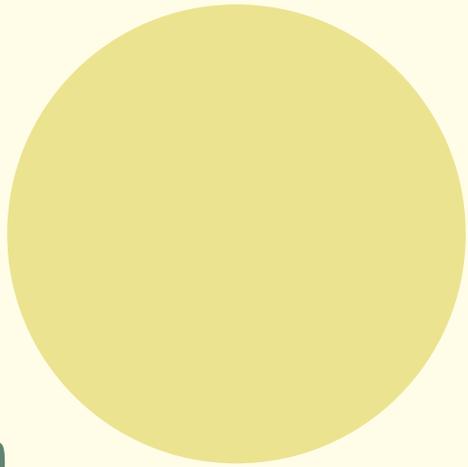
with accuracy who will or will not develop a psychological disorder after a traumatic event.

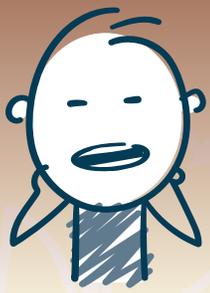
Nonetheless, it is generally recognized that the earlier a person consults after a traumatic event, the more likely they are to diminish the risks to develop PTSD or other



psychological disorders. Furthermore, it is important to know that even with the best therapy, it is impossible –after having experienced a trauma– to become exactly the person we were before the event. Such an event necessarily changes something in us. The desired objective in going for a quick consultation is to reduce the consequences of the event as much as possible. It is a bit like when we get a deep physical injury. It will leave a scar even after many years. However, if we take care of it as soon as possible, the scar will be much more discreet.

*Every little
step counts*





Anxiety When You Hold Us!

No one can boast that they never feel stress. Our North American style of life means that stress is virtually unavoidable. In fact, a certain amount of stress is actually beneficial and useful. However, if you have been a victim of a criminal act, you may feel more stress than usual. You may also experience anxiety.

What is the difference between stress and anxiety?

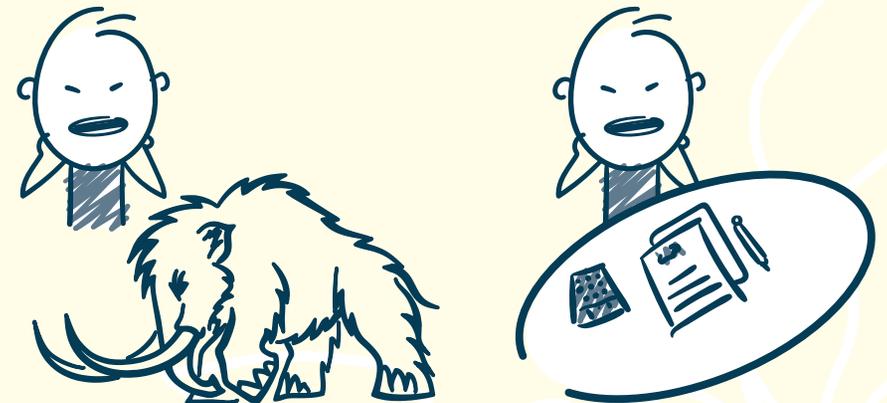
Stress is a normal phenomenon in the presence of a stressor. Let's imagine that we find ourselves in front of a ferocious mammoth. When our brain detects this threat, it stops in order to prepare our body to either fight or flee the threat. Our brain sends a message to our adrenal glands so that they produce the stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones send the necessary energy that we need in order for our muscles to fight, freeze or flee as fast as we can from the mammoth.

Why are we stressed when there are no more mammoth on earth? In fact, the absolute stressors, those that are interpreted as dangerous by a majority of people such as an earthquake, a fire, a tsunami (or mammoths), are rather rare in our lives. Thank goodness for that! However, we are surrounded by relative stressors: a job interview, an exam, traffic, a first date, etc. These are

all examples of situations that can cause our body to react as if there was a real danger, when in fact our life is not really threatened.

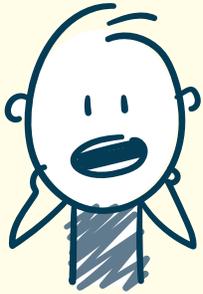
But why does our body react in the same way to an absolute or relative stressor? It is because our brain does not distinguish between the two types of stressors. Thus, it always prepares for the worst!

However, feeling stress every day and/or several times a day is rather unpleasant. It can even have significant consequences on both physical and mental health.

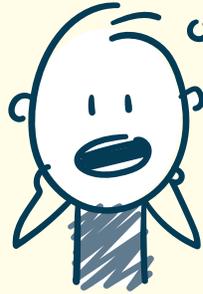


The good news is that there is a wide range of ways to reduce or better manage it. We invite you to check the **"Toolbox"** section of this guide to discover several stress management techniques.

Stress



Anxiety



On the other hand, **anxiety** is to anticipate that a future threat might occur. It is to create stress for oneself and to make scenarios when the risk that it will actually happen is variable and sometimes null. For example, worrying because we have not heard from someone for a few hours or days. Thinking that something has happened to them or that the person is angry at us. However, anxiety is considered problematic if such thoughts are sufficiently present and overwhelming that they affect the person's functioning. In the previous example, a problematic anxiety could be calling the person multiple times a day until they answer, lack of concentration at work or being unable to sleep because of thinking of what must have happened to them. It could even go so far as to generalize, "That's it, nobody loves me!"

N.U.T.S. (Ref. S. Lupien)

It is impossible to rapidly identify situations that could lead us to experience stress. In fact, if one of the elements of N.U.T.S. is present, stress will be felt. It is also possible that several elements of N.U.T.S. are present so the stress will probably be more intense.

What is N.U.T.S.? It is an acronym for remembering the specific elements that will make us experience stress. First, when we have the impression that we have little control over a situation, we will experience stress. If an unpredictable event occurs, we will experience stress. The same is true when we face something new and when our ego is threatened.



Let's take the example of a person who starts a new job:

- N** *New workplace, new tasks, new work team. Everything is new!*
- U** *I may have been hired for a 6 month contract without knowing if it can be renewed.*
- T** *Maybe I already have experience in this type of job but I have to accept that I do not know everything and that I have to learn the specifics of the workplace. It is possible that I am wrong or that I make mistakes.*
- S** *I do not have control over my new work team. Am I going to appreciate them and will they like me?*

When a red cap becomes as terrifying as a mammoth

We have all heard the expression, "We learn better when we have fun." Well, it is not just an adage, but a fact. This can be explained, among other things, by the fact that the hippocampus and the amygdala (the one located in our brain and not the ones we have in the back of our throats) are both connected together in our brain. The hippocampus plays an important role in learning and storing information while the amygdala is more involved in emotional response. Simply, since they are connected, when one of the two is activated, the other is as well. If we have pleasure, the amygdala is activated and activates the hippocampus, so we retain better. Interesting, isn't it?

What is less interesting is that the same mechanism also occurs for the strong negative emotions. Thus, a great fear will activate our amygdala, which will have the effect of stimulating the hippocampus that will then retain more of the details of what we are afraid of. This is a phenomenon that we have no control over and can occur when we are victims of a criminal act.

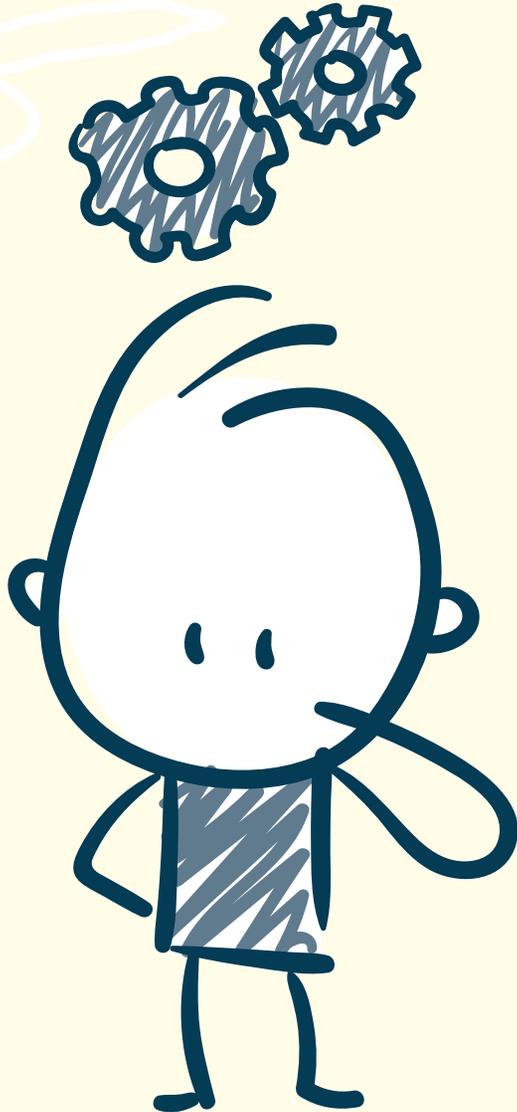
Therefore, we understand that our brain can thus associate fear with details which, in themselves, are not dangerous. For example, if I am a witness of an armed robbery and the robber wears a red cap, it is possible that my brain has associated this detail—a red cap—to the fear that I felt at the time. Hence, my brain interpreted and retained that red caps are dangerous. What do you think will happen when I see again someone wearing a red cap? Well, since our brain does not know the difference between absolute threats (what is really dangerous, for example a weapon that the individual used for the armed robbery) and relative threats (the red cap), my body will react exactly as if I were in real danger again, with all the physiological reactions we have just explained.

Now that we have a better understanding of what stress and anxiety consist of and that we know that it is impossible to avoid them completely, what can we do? The rest of this booklet will provide various tools



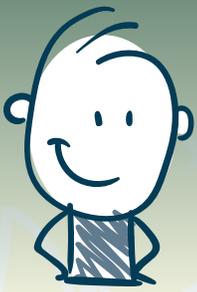
Anxiety When You Hold Us!

and strategies to help relieve stress and reduce its negative effects.



*You are always
stronger than
what you think.*





Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle

In the next section, we will discover many ways to take care of ourselves and to have a healthy lifestyle. These habits are important especially after having been a victim of a criminal act. We have to take care of ourselves even more than ever in order to regain a certain balance after having experienced an event that is out of the ordinary. When life is going well, we often forget to take care of ourselves or we feel less the need to do so. However, after having experienced such an event, it is essential to get back to basics.

You will find here information on how to meet your basic needs. It may seem simplistic at times, but these are the first essential steps towards recovery.

In a nutshell:

- Favor good sleep
- Drink water regularly and in sufficient quantity
- Aim for a healthy and balanced diet

- Avoid comfort foods that are sweet and fatty
- Beware of caffeine, alcohol, and cannabis
- Be physically active

If you would like to better understand these instructions, take the time to read this section. You will find information, tips, and tricks.

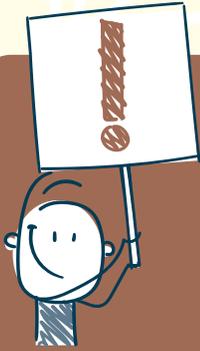
*If you prefer, for the time being, you can go directly to the **"Toolbox"** section.*

SLEEP

Sleep is essential for our psychological and physical health. However, following a criminal act, several factors can disrupt sleep (anxiety, nightmares, etc.). This is the reason why having a good sleep hygiene could be helpful. Here are some tips.

The bedroom should be a place that is relaxing and that promotes sleeping. Therefore, it is important to

use the bed only for sleeping and for sexual relations. It is important to avoid settling conflicts in bed. Favor relaxation by having a dark and comfortable room that brings calm.



Important :

If you have been in bed for 20 minutes and have not fallen asleep yet, get up to do something else: crossword puzzle, reading, etc. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

Nap: If you really feel the need to take a nap during the day, it should be less than 30 minutes and be before 3:00 p.m.

• Things to do

Have a sleep routine (turn off screens 1h before bedtime, read, go to bed at the same time, etc.).

Relaxation activities before going to bed: yoga, reading, breathing, taking a bath, listening to music, etc.

Go to bed when you feel tired.

Maintain a regular bedtime and wake-up time (even on weekends).

Expose yourself to daylight.

• Things to avoid

Consumption of alcohol, drugs, nicotine, coffee, energy drinks.

Intense physical activity before sleep.

Watching television, cell phones, any type of screens: prevents the secretion of melatonin (sleep hormone).

Heavy meals: there should be 2-3 hours between dinner and bedtime.

It is important to note that establishing an effective sleep routine takes place over a period of time. It will not work right away on the first night! You have to stick to your routine to eventually see the benefits.

Sleep Diary

It may be helpful to have a sleep diary where you can record important information related to your sleeping habits. For example:

- *The time and duration of your naps*
- *Ways you implemented to favor your sleep*
- *Bedtime and wake up time*
- *The time taken to fall asleep*
- *The number of awakenings and the duration*
- *Perception on the quality of sleep*

How about you? What is your sleep routine? If needed, use the sample diary in the "Toolbox".

Natural Supplements and Medication

Regardless of the type of medication or supplements available to help with sleep difficulties, it is important to talk to your pharmacist and/or your doctor about them before using them. By consulting them, you will be advised about the alternatives that suit you best.

FOOD

Have you ever noticed the effects of your mood on your appetite or on the quality of the food you eat? In periods of depression or intense stress for example, some people find that their appetite considerably decreases while for others the opposite happens and they tend to eat more... and not necessarily in a healthy way!



Food is to our bodies what gas (or electricity) is to our vehicles: it is what gives it energy to function. The same way we cannot put any liquid in the tank of our vehicle if we want it to run well, the food choices we make can influence our level of functioning both in terms of our physical energy as well as our ability to concentrate and to manage our emotions.

Although research indicates that there is no miracle food that on its own can reduce stress or improve mood, it is possible to pay attention to some things in order to, at least, avoid making the situation worse. The following tips

are good at all times and especially in the most difficult times.

Drinking Water!

A small and simple gesture that can make a big difference! Adult women should drink about 2 liters of water per day and men about 3 liters. Being well hydrated contributes, among other things, to the functioning of our brain (including emotional management) and prevents energy slumps.

Good news: all the following beverages can be counted in this daily amount – water (sparkling or not, flavored or not), vegetable juice, milk, herbal tea, tea, coffee (see note below regarding coffee).

A simple line drawing of a person with a large, glowing lightbulb above their head, signifying a tip or idea. The person has a happy expression.

Tips:

Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink! When you feel thirsty, you have already started to get dehydrated. Since we know that even a slight state of dehydration has a negative influence on our mood, prevention is the best. To help you, always have on you a reusable water bottle and drink regularly, even if you do not feel thirsty.

Aim for a balanced and regular diet

It is possible that if you have this booklet in your hands, you may not feel like cooking and it may be tempting to resort to comfort foods or foods that do not require preparation. However, these foods usually will not provide you with what your body needs in order to function optimally or to help you get through the bad times. In these moments, it is therefore all the more important to pay attention to your diet in order not to aggravate the negative effects of stress.

A varied diet is even more important in times of stress. Make sure you eat fruits and vegetables, whole grain products as well as a variety of proteins (meat and poultry, fish, legumes, tofu, nuts, and seeds). For

inspiration, do not hesitate to consult Canada's Food Guide at <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.

Multivitamins or Vitamin Supplements

Let's debunk the myth right away: vitamins do not give you energy! Physical energy comes from the calories contained in our food but vitamins do not contain any. With some exceptions, to maintain a good health, it is rather recommended to have a varied and balanced diet than taking supplements. If it is difficult for you to respect such diet, it may be pertinent to consult with your doctor or pharmacist in order to evaluate the relevance of taking vitamin supplements.



Tips:



- *Check if someone you know could cook a few small dishes that you would only have to heat up.*
- *If you do not have much of an appetite, choose meals that you like. You like Shepherd's pie; eat it! In small quantities. Regularly. It is okay to eat it for a few days if that is all you feel like eating!*
- *Eating more often during the day, in smaller quantities, is a good way to give your body what it needs when you have less appetite.*
- *If you have a bit of energy to make a meal, take the opportunity to double the recipe and freeze some or save the rest for the next day.*
- *Some foods require little preparation while being nutritious: eggs, hummus with whole grain crackers, raw vegetables, fruits, a toast with peanut butter or other nuts, mixed nuts, yogurt, etc.*
- *Whenever possible, at mealtime, take time to sit around a table with nice people to share a meal that you like.*

**The little pleasures...
that it is preferable to avoid!**

Sweet and/or fatty foods

Ah! These little pleasures for the palate... They are so tempting in times of stress or when your morale is not at its best. Why? Because they release endorphins, which provide a feeling of well-being. However, their effect is short-lived and the danger is that you will want to repeat the pleasure regularly in order to maintain the effects.



Yet, getting used to eating less nutritive foods to help us manage our stress or our emotions can have risks and cause us to develop other undesirable health problems. These foods should therefore be eaten sparingly.

Some examples of these foods at risk of addiction: chocolate, candy, chips, commercial granola bars, cookies, etc.

Caffeine

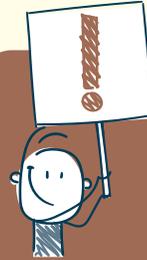
You probably already know this, but caffeine is a stimulant. A stimulant means being under the impression of having more energy or concentration. It is true... in moderate amounts. The negative effects



of caffeine are quickly felt when one exceeds certain daily amounts. Caffeine can prevent us from feeling tired and delay the need for sleep. Let's just say that if you already have

insomnia because of stress, caffeine will not help you at all.

Other less interesting effects are also possible if you consume caffeine in large doses: palpitations, rapid breathing, headaches, caffeinism (tremors, anxiety attacks, irritability, restlessness, and sleep disorders). If you experience anxiety, you probably already feel these symptoms. Caffeine may make them worse.



Warning:

If you consume a lot of caffeine, on a daily basis for years, you cannot stop completely overnight. You may feel very bad. However, you may want to taper off gradually if you wish to see the benefits that this could have on you.

Alcohol

It is true that a small quantity of alcohol can help you relax. However, alcohol is known to be a central nervous system depressant. When taken in big quantities, in addition to the negative effects on your health, alcohol can also have impacts on your behavior: increase your aggressiveness or your depressive symptoms. If you have this documents in your hands, you clearly want to avoid these negative effects. So, moderation has its place here.

Cannabis

Cannabis is a psychoactive substance, classified in the list of central nervous system disruptors. As a result, the consumers' cognitive abilities can be affected

a few minutes after consumption. Cannabis is often consumed for its euphoric, relaxing, and other effects. It is normal to want to calm down when one is going through difficult situations. It may be tempting to turn to cannabis to lessen the consequences you feel after a criminal act. However, the current research findings are uncertain about medical cannabis and the treatment of post-traumatic stress.

Thus, the risks associated with cannabis use should not be dismissed. If you consume cannabis, you should talk to your doctor since there may be interactions with certain medications and cause adverse symptoms such as depressive symptoms and anxiety.



Beware of self-medication!

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

We all know that it has been proven that physical activity has enormous benefits for our overall health, especially on reducing depression and anxiety symptoms. Of course, it is normal that you do not have the desire or energy to be physically active after experiencing a trauma. Respect your pace. However, it is important that you be disciplined since it is by moving that you will regain energy. Instead of taking a 30-minute walk, start with 5 to 10 minutes and gradually increase the time. Do not wait until you are motivated to start exercising and enjoy the process.

Here are some benefits of physical activity:

Biological Benefits:

- Increase in energy level
- Activation of hormones and neurotransmitters
- Anxiolytic effect (relaxing) and antidepressant (energizing)
- Decrease of nervous tension
- Increase in physical condition and better general health
- Reduces sleep disorders

Psychological Benefits:

- Changes in thoughts
- Emotional regulation
- Improvement of cognitive functions (concentration, memory, problem-solving)
- Increase in self-esteem
- Development of the sense of self-efficacy
- Reduced risk of developing mental disorders

Social Benefits:

- Maintaining social interactions
- Breaking down isolation
- Having relationships with others or group

A little science!

When we are physically active, our bodies secrete monoamines and endorphins. Monoamines are known for their antidepressant and mood regulating effects. The secretion of endorphins, on the other hand, has an analgesic effect; it reduces pain, provides a feeling of euphoria, and therefore reduces the harmful effects of stress. It also provokes an increase in body

temperature and promotes better blood circulation in the brain. These effects have a direct impact on hormonal regulation by decreasing the physiological reactivity to stress.

If your body allows it, here are some tips to help you be active:

- **Choose an activity that you enjoy. Go by your preference: solo or group activity, indoors or outdoors, with a fixed or variable schedule, etc.**
- **Set a goal: to relax, to correct your posture, to lose weight, to take on a personal challenge, etc.**
- **Make sure you have the physical and financial capacity to engage in the activity you have chosen.**
- **Make physical activity part of your commute, for example walking or cycling.**



Please note that:

If you have a physical disability or limitation, it is preferable that you refer to your doctor before starting a new physical activity.

In short, all these tips are obviously not sufficient on their own to get you out of a stressful or depressive period! However, taking steps to move towards these good habits can certainly help you not to accentuate the difficulties you are experiencing.



*All Storms
Have An End*





The Toolbox

SELF-SOOTHING STRATEGIES

Soothing techniques aim to regain a state of calm, to appease the activation of the nervous system, and to restore balance. The incorporation of this type of practice on a daily basis would have benefits on the quality of sleep for people suffering from post-traumatic stress. It would help the management of symptoms. Positive effects would also be observed on the level of irritability, self-esteem, and the nervous system in general.



Breathing Techniques

There is a variety of breathing techniques, all of which can be effective depending on the regularity that we practice them. In fact, to feel the benefits, breathing exercises must be practiced regularly. It is not a magic wand that will instantly eliminate anxiety when it is intense. On the other hand, if practiced regularly, these exercises will provide you with beneficial moments of pause and can help you, in the long run, to better tolerate anxiety and stress when present.

It is impossible to make a complete inventory of the diverse breathing techniques. We suggest two techniques but you can also use the ones you already know or do some research on the Internet. The important thing is to choose the strategies that you prefer.

General Guidelines:

- Take it easy. Do not force it.
- Some people can feel slightly dizzy when they start practicing deep breathing. This effect is caused by the extra oxygen that their body is not used to.

Blocked Breathing 2-2-2

Make yourself comfortable. Keep your eyes open.

- Do the exercise for 5 minutes twice a day.
- Breath in for 2 counts (count in your head 1 crocodile... 2 crocodiles...).
- Hold your breath for 2 counts.
- Exhale for 2 counts.

Step 1

Sitting in a quiet environment.

Step 2

Standing in a quiet environment.

Step 3

Sitting in a busy environment.

Step 4

Standing in a busy environment.

Make sure to practice each step long enough for it to become easy before moving to the next step.

When you master the exercise well, you can apply it in more stressful situations. It is possible to gradually increase the blockage time to a maximum of 4 counts. Note that inhaling and exhaling always remain at 2 counts.

Cardiac Coherence

It is a technique of rhythmic breathing known for its ability to regulate the heartbeat. It would also allow to restore a state of energy when we are tired, and to induce a state of calm when we are more anxious. It consists of breathing in a cyclic way at a rate of five seconds for inhaling and five seconds for exhaling. It is recommended to practice cardiac coherence for about five minutes, three times a day.

The number to remember. 365!

3

3 times per day

6

Six breaths per minute

5

For 5 minutes

3

Three times per day because the beneficial effects of the practice last only a few hours (3 to 6 hours). An average of 4 hours between each practice is therefore recommended. The first session is the most important and should be when you get up. It will help you to cope with the stress of the day. Do the second session 4 hours later in order to mitigate the events of the morning and prepare you to digest your next meal. The third session should be in the middle or late afternoon.

6

Six breaths per minute because this is the frequency that allows for an optimal increase in the amplitude of cardiac variability. This is simply physiological. Inhaling for 5 seconds and exhaling for 5 seconds, adopting an abdominal inhalation through the nose and exhaling through the mouth in a soft and continuous way.

5

For five minutes because that is long enough to obtain the desired physiological results and avoid the intrusive thoughts that usually occur after 5 minutes.

365

It is also 365 days a year because we should do it every day since it has tremendous physical health benefits in the long run.

Note that sitting with a straight back is recommended because the cardiac coherence does not work well in the supine position for anatomical and physiological reasons.

Various applications exist to guide the cardiac coherence exercises.

For example:
Respidetente & Respirelax+



Other Strategies

5 Senses Exercise

This anchoring technique allows you to refocus on the present moment during your moments of anxiety and anguish. It can even help you when you have “flashbacks” or difficulty sleeping. In addition, it does not require you to close your eyes. It consists only of naming and describing in as much details as possible, using your five senses, what surrounds you as if you would describe it to a person who is not present with you.

-  • **Sight:** Describe the objects, colors, and shapes you see in your environment.
-  • **Hearing:** Describe the sounds around you.
-  • **Smell:** Describe the odors you smell.
-  • **Taste:** Describe the flavors you taste.
-  • **Touch:** Touch an object or surface within reach and describe its shapes, textures, heat, etc.

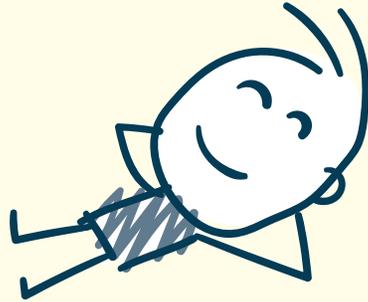
Jacobson

The Jacobson method consists of contracting and then relaxing the muscles of your body. You may have probably noticed that when you are more stressed or anxious, you have more muscular tensions. By provoking a muscular tension, and then focusing on the sensations produced by the relaxation, it will allow you to eliminate excess tension and reduce your stress considerably. Consequently, you will reach a state of increased general relaxation both physically and mentally.

Please note that a relaxation technique cannot be mastered from the first session. A few repetitions of the exercises will be necessary before you manage to relax with ease and efficiency.

Settle down in a comfortable and calm place. Get into a sitting or lying position. For more comfort, put your head on a cushion or a pillow. You can also cover yourself with a light blanket since body temperature tends to drop in a state of relaxation.

Go to the following link in order to listen to an audio clip lasting about 20 minutes that will guide you through the exercise: <https://www.telug.ca/site/infolettre/articles/relaxation-progressive-de-jacobson.php>. Take this well-invested time. It will allow you to resume your activities with more energy and concentration afterwards.



Mindfulness Meditation

Meditation is an extraordinary tool to take care of our mental health, to strengthen our attention, and to bring out the best in us. The interesting thing about meditation is that we can practice it anywhere, anytime. Whether we have five minutes or half an hour, whether we are at home or in the office, on the bus or the subway, sitting, standing or lying down, we can meditate. The most important thing in the practice of meditation is regularity, which is the reason why some books recommend meditating at the same time every day.

There is no specific duration or minimum time to meditate. If you are just starting out, it is recommended to start with short sessions of five or ten minutes a day. Over time, you will progress to longer sessions. Fifteen minutes of meditation per day is enough to see the positive impact on your mental and physical state of being.

Moreover, contrary to what one may think, it is not a question of slowing down our thoughts nor is it a matter of trying to clear our minds. Mindfulness meditation is to observe—without any judgement—the functioning of our minds in order to identify the thoughts that are troubling our inner peace and free ourselves from them. If your mind escapes or gets distracted by a thought, a sensation, or a sound, it is normal. Simply come back to observing your breath,



without judgement..

There are many forms of meditation. Some are silent, others are done by repeating a word or looking at an image, the flame of a candle, by concentrating on the breath, an ambient sound, the beating of one's heart... Choose the one that suits you best.

One of the most popular and the most accessible methods is mindfulness meditation. It is practiced in a sitting position. The importance is to feel stable and comfortable. Keep your back straight, your pelvis slightly titled backwards, and your shoulders down. Relax your jaw and slightly pull your chin in. Your eyes can be half closed or closed.

Take three long and deep breaths through the nose, relaxing all the muscles in your body, then breathe normally. Be alert enough not to fall asleep but relaxed enough not to create tension in your body. Do not try to stop your thoughts or reach a state of emptiness or calmness. Let your thoughts run through your head and let your emotions come and go. Do not try to reach a particular state. Of course you will feel your body release its tensions and your mind calm down, but the practice goes beyond simple relaxation. Be simply present to what is in you and around you. To meditate, one should remember, is about developing a state of openness to all that presents itself. This is why when we speak of meditation, we also speak of **a kindness attitude towards oneself**.

The benefits and obstacles of meditation:

Benefits

Possible relief from the first sessions.

Regular practice improves overall well-being.

Helps to fight stress, calm anxiety, increase ability to bear pain, insomnia, and depression.

Obstacles

Difficulty staying still (physical discomfort or joint pain). Find the best position for you.

Tendency to want to completely clear one's head while it is normal to have thoughts. Let them pass by with kindness, like the clouds that pass and go away.

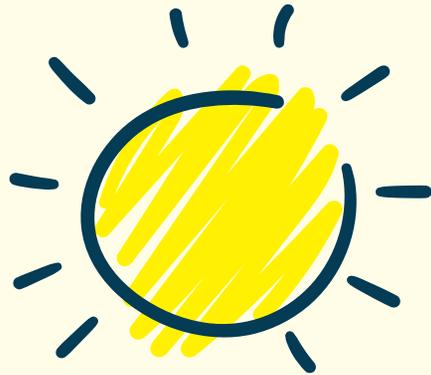
Finally, meditation is not a magic wand nor a miracle solution to make all our problems and worries disappear. Moreover, even if the practice of meditation proves to be disconcertingly simple, this does not mean that it is easy. Nor is it a one-size-fits-all solution that is good for everyone. It is up to you to try it!

SMALL PLEASURES AND OTHER TOOLS

In this section, you will find ideas for activities and tools that could do you good. Challenge yourself to try some of them!

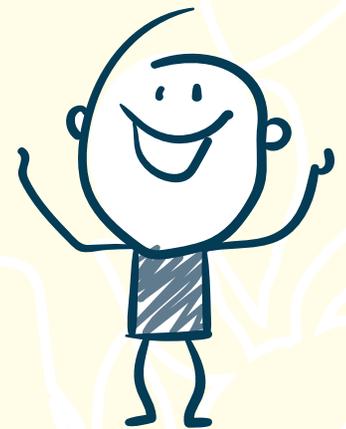
What I can do to make my day sunnier

- Go hiking in the mountains
- Play sports: swimming, badminton, cycling, etc.
- Go to the movies
- Go to a show/concert
- Play a musical instrument
- Artistic creation: jewelry, knitting, other
- Cook
- Challenge yourself to try something new
- Attend a conference
- Go fishing, kayaking
- Build something: bird feeder
- Do crossword puzzles, sudoku, word searches
- Rearrange a room in the house
- Organize a party with friends/family
- Etc.



Low cost or free activities

- Renting a book at the library: low cost when you have an access card
- Accessing the city's indoor and outdoor skating rinks
- Accessing the city's indoor and outdoor pools
- Going for a walk in nature
- Sitting in the sun
- Breathing fresh air
- Spending time with someone who is healthy for you
- Coloring/drawing
- Doing volunteer work
- Spending time outdoors: chopping wood, doing the lawn, raking leaves
- Meditation, yoga, breathing
- Playing cards
- Taking a bath
- Playing a board game
- Writing a journal
- Watching a movie
- Having a picnic
- Listening to a comedy show
- Listening to music you like
- Etc.



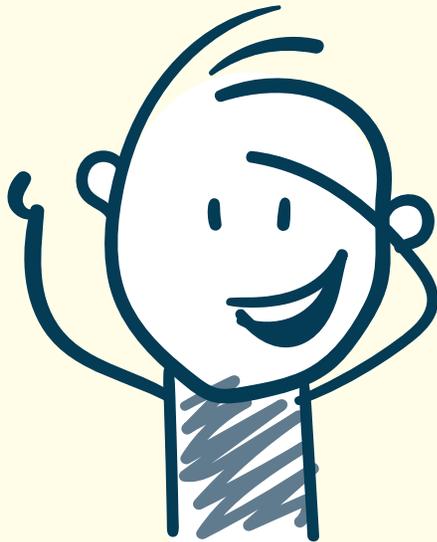
Register for an activity

Check the community center in your area for organized activities (“leisure access card”). Great opportunities to spend energy, meet new people or simply take care of yourself! Here are some examples of activities that can be offered: tai-chi, yoga, ball field hockey, tennis, cross-country skiing, skating, badminton, cooking classes, conferences, English classes, music classes, artistic creation, etc.

A look towards the positive

Human beings tend to be negative and to focus on what is not going well. This exercise suggests you take about 5 minutes a day to write in a notebook, on your phone or something else, 3 things that made you feel good during the day (sipping a good latte in front of a TV series, a friend’s compliment, having finished building a chicken coop, etc.).

Try to do the exercise for several weeks. By repeating this exercise, you train your brain to pay more attention to positive things.



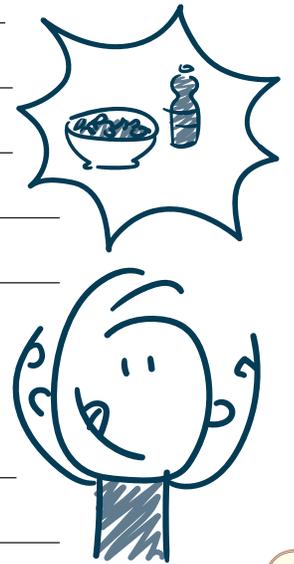
Show
kindness
to yourself



List of my favorite songs



List of my favorite meals





*Courage is not the
absence of fear but the
ability to overcome it.*





If you would like to dig in deeper

Here are some references:

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- Brillon, P. (2017). Se relever d'un traumatisme : Réapprendre à vivre et à faire confiance. Montréal : Les Éditions Québec-Livres.
- Marquis, S. (2011). Pensouillard le Hamster : petit traité de décroissance personnelle. Montréal : Éditions Transcontinental. **A short and well-popularized book on mindfulness. Written by a Quebec physician.**
- O'Hare, D. (2013). 5 minutes le matin : Exercices simples de méditation pour les stressés, très pressés. Vergèze : Éditions Thierry Souccar. **This book is written by a French family doctor to help people integrate relaxation into their daily lives.**

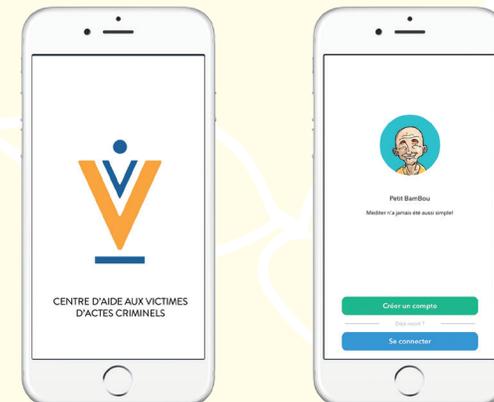
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CAVAC App

Available on App Store and Google Play

Petit Bamboo Meditation App

(The free version may be sufficient)



In Conclusion...

We hope that reading this guide has helped you to better understand your condition and give you tools to calm yourself.



Remember that, following a criminal act, it is important to quickly consult with a specialized professional in order to receive the necessary support to move forward, but also to learn more about the other resources as well as your rights and recourses.

*Healing does not mean that
the damage never existed;
it means that it no longer
controls our lives.*

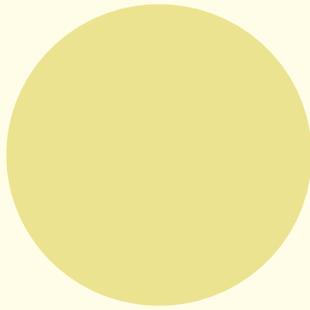
- TRACE LAB -

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Take care of yourself
as you would take care of
someone you care about

