



May is Mental Health Month

Adapting after trauma and stress

We all face trauma, adversity and other stressors throughout our lives. When people think of trauma, they often think of things like abuse, terrorism or catastrophic events. Trauma can also be caused by events that are less obvious, but still overwhelm our ability to deal with them, such as frequent arguing at home or losing a job. Our mental health can be affected by trauma of any kind. Following are ways we can build our resiliency and feel better.

Process your thoughts

During and after trauma, it is common to switch into survival mode and have no energy to wrap your head around what has happened. It may feel safest to bury painful feelings and avoid confronting them, but recognizing what has happened and how it has affected you is one of the healthiest things you can do.

Connect with people

A support system is an important part of well-being. Emotional support helps us feel less alone or overwhelmed by what has happened in our lives. Talking to someone who has had a similar experience, or someone who cares for you, can be an affirmation—and help you cope better with the challenges you face.

Do not compare your experiences with those of others

We often question our own thoughts or experiences, and you can convince yourself that what you have experienced was not a big deal because “others have it worse.” Everyone experiences a trauma differently, and no trauma is “worse” than the other. If it hurts you, then it hurts you—and your feelings and experiences are valid.

Take care of your body

Stress and trauma affect your physical health as well as your mind. Listening to your body and giving it what it needs will help you heal. This includes a nutritious diet, sufficient sleep and regular exercise. Moving your body every day, even if it is just a few minutes of stretching, is particularly helpful in healing trauma.

Know it will take time

There is no predetermined timetable for “healing.” Remove the pressure to get back on your feet quickly and focus on taking one step at a time. Remember: recovery is not linear, and it is normal to have bad days and setbacks. It doesn’t mean you fail—it’s just part of the process.

Treat yourself with compassion

Dealing with trauma and stress is not an easy task, and it is common to be frustrated with yourself and what can sometimes be a slow recovery process. Try to catch when you are holding yourself to unreasonable standards - instead of angrily asking, "Why am I doing this?" Remember how impressive it is that you are continuing despite what you have experienced.

Don't be ashamed to ask for help

It is easy to compare how you feel, and how you assume that others who have had similar experiences feel, and you may get down on yourself because everyone else seems to be doing well. What others experience and how they deal with it does not matter on your journey—if you feel that you need or want help, it is important to get it as soon as possible.

For more information, visit www.AFPC.AF.MIL/EAP or call your Air Force EAP at 1-866-580-9078 (TTY 711) for compassionate and caring support.