

## **Self Care Tips for News Media**

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<https://dartcenter.org/content/self-care-tips-for-news-media-personnel-exposed-to-traumatic-events#.VUIfR5TF-20>

*These tips are offered as suggestions only, to assist in fostering healthier newsrooms and better journalism. They are based on research findings on well-being and resilience and the practical experience of news professionals in the field.*

### **Before a potentially traumatic assignment**

- Talk through possible emotional risks with your editor or manager. Take them seriously.
- Agree how you will keep in regular touch, particularly if difficulties arise.
- Agree that partners and families are kept informed.
- Maintain strong social supports and peer networks.
- See crises as challenges to learn from. Maintain an optimistic outlook and positive self-view.
- Remember that the journalism of trauma matters. What you do is important and worthwhile.
- Camera operators - be familiar with equipment - malfunctions or not being able to file will compound a stressful situation.

### **On the job**

- Understand that distress in the face of tragedy is a normal human response – not weakness. Most people recover soon enough.
- Ensure proper eating, hydration and sleep. All of these can affect journalistic judgement.
- Easy on ‘self medication’. Overuse of substances is an indicator that all is not well.
- Get some exercise if you can. Even a walk helps break down ‘stress chemicals’ in the body.
- Take breaks – and encourage others to as well. This assists integration of material and enables clarity.
- Acknowledge your feelings. Understanding feelings informs your journalism and helps you process trauma.
- Talk to others. Take time to reflect on what you are witnessing and how you are responding and, if possible, talk about it with colleagues. Share your thoughts.

- Call home. Maintain contact with loved ones and peers— especially on long assignments.
- Make decisions in the moment and don't ruminate about 'what if's'. Reassess later if necessary.
- Don't look at grotesque images too long.
- Look out for others in your team.
- Know your limits. Request rotation if needed.
- If you are feeling distressed don't hide it. Such responses are human and it is not weak, unprofessional or career-threatening to admit them.
- Camera operators - maintain contact with the desk as well as fellow photographers/camera operators for feedback and ideas. Don't dwell on missed opportunities.
- Camera operators – use the ritual of organising your equipment at the end of each day as a 'de-stress' activity.

### **To watch for on the job**

- Disorientation or 'spacey' feelings.
- Difficulty doing simple tasks or problem solving.
- The '100 metre stare'.
- Impulsivity, extreme anger, argumentativeness, violence.
- Constantly distracted.
- Distortion of time.
- Expressions of futility, helplessness, terror, fear for ones life, shame.
- Physical or mental exhaustion.

### **Common responses immediately after witnessing trauma**

- Sleeplessness
- Upsetting dreams
- Intrusive images or thoughts of the event
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- Feeling that bad things are about to happen to you

- Being jumpy and easily startled
- Physical reactions such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, nausea when reminded of a traumatic event

**These reactions may indicate a need for a break or rotation. If they continue for longer than 3-4 weeks, or at any stage feel extremely overwhelming seek the help of a trauma therapist.**

#### **After the job**

- Debrief with someone you trust. Choose a good listener. Don't bottle up feelings.
- Monitor for delayed reactions – they can catch you by surprise at a later date.
- Maintain normal routines and activities, but slow down. Look after yourself.
- If distress continues beyond 3-4 weeks seek professional assistance from a health care practitioner trained in trauma.

For further information, [contact the Dart Center](#) or [email Dart Centre Australasia](#).