COPING WITH A MAJOR PERSONAL CRISIS

Events, which threaten our lives or our physical or psychological well-being, include;

- Major disasters which impact broadly on many people
- More personal incidents such as a major injury or illness, loss of a close relationship through death or separation or any other significant life events

If you have experienced a traumatic event we hope this pamphlet will help you to understand what you may experience immediately afterwards as well as later on.

It will also show you how to help the healing process and avoid pitfalls.

Normal Feelings and Emotions Often Experienced

- **Numbness**... your mind may only allow you to feel the impact of the event slowly; you or others may interpret this as “being strong” or “not caring.”
- **Fear**... of damage to oneself and loved ones; of being left alone; of losing control and of a similar thing happening again.
- **Guilt**... for being alive or uninjured; for things not done.
- **Helplessness and Confusion**... at being powerless in a situation; at losing any previously held sense of security.
- **Anger**... at what has happened; at the injustice and senselessness of it; with those who may have been culpable or incompetent; why should it happen to me?
- **Sadness**... for losses of every kind
- **Shame**... for being helpless; for being emotional and needing others; for not having reacted as one would have liked.

Common Physical and Mental Reactions....

- Tiredness
- Exhaustion
- Nightmares
• Palpitations
• sleep and eating disturbances
• being jumpy and easily startled.
• vivid recall of the event, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, persistent thoughts about this event and other incidents

**Effects on Relationships**

You may find that close relationships become strained, particularly if friends and family do not understand what you are going through and you may withdraw from them. It may be helpful to show them this leaflet.

Try to remember that other people are your main source of comfort during a crisis. Talking about what happened and expressing your feelings to a trusted and sympathetic listener can be very helpful.

**How You Can Help Yourself**

- **Self Expression**...As you allow yourself to reflect more on this trauma you may well think, talk and also dream about it over and over again. Many people find it helpful to talk to others following a traumatic incident, particularly if those others were also present at the event. Expressing feelings rather than bottling them up can be very therapeutic and reduce the risk of nervous and physical problems emerging. However we are all different in how we deal with life events and some people prefer to cope with these by themselves. Listen to yourself and do what you feel is best for you.

- **Confronting Reality**...If you feel able to; confronting reality by attending funerals and looking at losses will help you come to terms with the event. Some people find it helpful to revisit the scene when they feel able to do so. If you are troubled by a particular part of the incident, making sure that you know what really happened can be helpful.

**Taking Care of Yourself**

- Keep life as normal as possible
- Be kind to yourself – what you are feeling is a natural reaction
- Take time to rest, eat well, exercise and sleep
- Try to express your needs clearly and honestly to family and friends
• Remember children need to talk about their emotions and express themselves in games and drawing

Remember all of these feelings and reactions are normal after what you have experienced and are part of the healing process.

However if after four to six weeks you are not starting to feel better it would probably help you to seek some professional assistance.

Help available:
University Counselling Service
01224 272139 or counselling@abdn.ac.uk

A full list of both internal and external support resources can be found on our website www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling/links