

# Road Trauma Support Team Victoria



Road Trauma Support Team (RTSTV) was founded in 1994 after a group of concerned individuals with direct experience in road trauma joined with professionals working in the area to provide a support service. In 1997, Victorian Regional groups in Swan Hill and Warrnambool joined with RTSTV Melbourne to become incorporated.

RTSTV is based in Blackburn. It provides state-wide free professional phone counselling, face-to-face counselling, support groups and educational programs.

## **What is trauma?**

Every year, tens of thousands of Australians will suffer bewildering symptoms in the aftermath of even minor road collisions.

These symptoms are a response to having experienced a traumatic event.

## **A traumatic event is one where you have:**

1. Perceived threats to your life or body
2. Were exposed to or involved in a life threatening event (which explains why witnesses and people who are first on scene can sometimes experience these responses)
3. Hearing about unexpected violence to or death of a person close to you

It is quite normal to have a range of reactions (physical, mental and behavioral) to a road collision. People's reactions range from a mild stress response to moderate stress (where normal coping mechanisms are overwhelmed) through to a more severe post traumatic stress response. Some people (about 1 in 10) have no reaction at all.

For most people, these reactions do not interfere greatly with their lives and they usually fade after a period of four to six weeks. If you continue to experience reactions for a longer period of time, or if you feel that they are greatly affecting your life, you may find a visit to your doctor or a call to the Road Trauma Support Team helpful.

### **Common reactions to trauma**

#### Physical:

- Nausea, diarrhoea
- Trembling, fast heart beat, sweating
- Restlessness, problems getting to or staying asleep

#### Thinking:

- Difficulty with memory or concentration
- Unable to understand your reactions
- Thinking that you shouldn't be having these reactions (judging yourself harshly)
- Seeing or hearing the event as though it is still happening

#### Feeling:

- Anxious, numb
- Sad, angry, guilty
- Mood swings, feeling unsafe

#### Behaviours:

- Easily startled, tearful
- Avoiding reminders of the collision (e.g. a particular intersection)
- Increased alcohol/drug use

### **Self care strategies:**

It is important to take care of yourself in the aftermath of a road collision. If you are experiencing reactions, remember that these may affect you for four to six weeks, so you may need to be patient with yourself. Other strategies for looking after yourself include:

- Talk with people who you love and accept their offers of support.
- Realise that recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal, so don't try to fight them. They should decrease over time.
- Light physical activity can be helpful.
- Avoid alcohol/drug consumption (except for prescription drugs).
- Eat regularly. If you are feeling nauseous, you may find eating smaller amounts more frequently easier to manage.
- Maintain your normal bedtime routine. If you wake early, try not to worry about it. If you don't go back to sleep within about 20 minutes, get up and do a quiet activity until you feel sleepy again and then return to bed.

If you notice that your response is severe or not fading with time, you may consider calling the Road Trauma Support Team to talk with one of our counsellors.

**Toll free helpline 1300 367 797**



**1300 782 231**