Supporting someone after trauma

For partners, family and friends.

When someone close to you has been through trauma, you may feel helpless, shut out or unsure what to say. You do not need the perfect words. Being steady and present matters most.

What you might see

- Mood swings, irritability, anger over small things
- Withdrawal and wanting to be alone
- Jumpiness, poor sleep, nightmares
- Avoiding places, people or activities
- Seeming distant, numb or "not themselves"

None of this means they do not care about you. It means their nervous system is overloaded.

What helps

- Listening without trying to fix
- Believing them
- Asking what they need
- Keeping ordinary routines going
- Being patient with slow progress
- Respecting "not today"

What does not help

- Pressing for details
- "You should be over it by now"
- "At least..." or "It could have been worse"
- Telling them what they should have done
- Taking the anger personally
- Walking on eggshells for ever

Things you could say

> *"I am here. You do not have to talk, and you can if you want to."*
>
> *"It makes sense that you feel this way after what happened."*
>
> *"What would help right now?"*

When to encourage more help

If the reactions last more than a month, are getting worse, or involve heavy drinking or talk of not wanting to be here, encourage them to see their GP or a therapist. Offer to help with the first step. If you think they are in immediate danger, call 112 or 999. Samaritans are on freephone 116 123, day or night.

Mind yourself

Supporting someone through trauma is demanding. Keep up your own sleep, friendships and interests. You will be more help, for longer, if you are rested.

My notes and questions

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