

Keeping Yourself Healthy

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None of us are immune from being affected by the highly-charged emotional fallout of dealing with infant loss. When you are repeatedly exposed to such tragic, raw emotion and loss, it will start to have a profound effect on you. How you deal with these memories and emotions can make an enormous difference in your emotional and mental well being.

This article is designed to help you recognize and cope with the painful symptoms of stress that can accompany a traumatic event or the accumulation of such events.

Here are some symptoms you should look out for:

1. Recurrent and vivid dreams about the event
2. Difficulty making decisions
3. Memory lapses/poor concentration
4. Anger or irritability
5. Withdrawing from others
6. Fatigue
7. Headaches or other pain

What can you do about it?

As a NILMDTS volunteer, you have much to offer to families who are suffering. By learning how to take care of yourself, you will be able to continue helping countless others during their time of need.

Here are some coping strategies that you can use to help work through the stress that may come from performing this rewarding, yet challenging volunteer work.

Surviving Cumulative Stress

1. Learn to depersonalize the process and not internalize the intense emotions of others
2. Learn to have realistic expectations of yourself and others
3. Laugh- Do not lose the capacity for joy
4. Pay attention to your diet and exercise
5. Learn to manage your time by saying "no" when necessary

Develop Mental Coping Skills

1. Recognize your symptoms of stress
2. Examine your lifestyle and see what can and needs to be changed
3. Use relaxation techniques (deep breathing, massage, etc.)
4. Talk with someone you trust
5. Stop overly negative thoughts and learn how to reframe your experiences (Look for positive aspects of situations, if possible)

Develop Physical Coping Skills

1. Exercise
2. Watch your diet- alcohol, caffeine, sugar, fats and tobacco all put a strain on your body's ability to cope with stress
3. Get more rest and sleep (if possible)
4. Get away for awhile- take that needed vacation!

Healthy Distractions

1. Listen to music
2. Journaling- write down your thoughts
3. Read or go to the movies

Signs that you need to seek help include:

1. Experiencing flashbacks- the event keeps playing over in your mind
2. Experiencing avoidance behavior- you find yourself saying no to sessions when you have no scheduling conflicts
3. Experiencing any symptoms for over a month

We hope this article has been helpful. Take care of yourself!