

Crisis intervention in victims of traumatic events: When, how and what for?

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Victims of traumatic events are subject to severe stress and disruption and may manifest a pattern of dissociative and anxiety/depression symptoms. The trauma may impair the person's quality of life and disrupt social and other functioning. If symptoms last longer than a month after the traumatic event, posttraumatic stress disorder may ensue. Crisis intervention is focused on ensuring safety and providing support, including assessment of coping resources and support networks. The role of early psychological debriefing to prevent psychopathology following a traumatic event is to help victims ventilate emotions and to detect individuals who require more complex intervention. Despite its popularity, there is no convincing evidence that psychological debriefing diminishes the incidence of posttraumatic psychopathology. However it may be very interesting to develop screening methods to identify individuals at most risk for posttraumatic psychopathology and to develop early treatment methods. The issues addressed in therapy include the need to correct unrealistic expectations, to deal with guilt and phobic reactions as well as family and network reorganization. These new approaches, as well as predictive factors of recovery and of poor prognosis, are discussed.