



# Coping with the Unthinkable

## Recovering from Secondary Trauma

### What is Trauma?

Trauma is when we experience an out-of-the-ordinary situation where death or serious physical harm is threatened or experienced, and we view the situation as a threat.

### What is Secondary Trauma?

Secondary Trauma is when we indirectly experience someone else's trauma (i.e. watching television coverage, hearing someone tell their story about an experience).

### Problems Associated with Trauma

1. Re-experiencing the trauma in the form of dreams, flashbacks, unwanted memories, or unrest at being in situations that remind you of the original trauma.
2. Avoiding situations and activities that remind you of the trauma, by either numbing our emotions, reducing interest in activities, others, and the outside world
3. Experiencing hyper-arousal such as insomnia, agitation, easily startled, or outbursts of anger or rage.

### To Reduce or Prevent Trauma Anxiety

When we experience traumatic activity, it is very common to hold it inside, withdraw, and not talk about it. Traumatic situations can kind of numb us in this way. When we "swallow down" our emotions, we are increasing the likelihood of experiencing future problems as listed above.

What we need to do when we experience a trauma is to talk about the trauma. In my counseling practice I commonly use the following simplified four-step guideline that was inspired by the Mitchell Model promoted by the Critical Incident Stress Management Foundation. *For information on the actual Mitchell Model and available trainings, visit their website at [www.icisf.org](http://www.icisf.org).*

1. Describe the traumatic situation as you personally experienced it.
2. Describe the emotional feelings you experienced at the time of the trauma.
3. Describe your current emotional feelings now that some time has passed since experiencing the trauma.
4. Describe how you plan to handle this trauma if you have to experience it again, or how you plan to handle a similar traumatic situation in the future.

### When to Get Help

Traumatic experience should not be taken lightly. When symptoms of traumatic anxiety develop and are ignored, they can linger and sometimes worsen indefinitely. If a number of symptoms develop and last longer than a few days, a person might meet the criteria for a condition called Acute Stress Disorder, and if they persist to a significant degree for more than a month, they may develop into what is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

If you have no one with whom to talk through the trauma, or if you find the symptoms are persistent or worsening, do yourself a very big favor and seek professional help. Find a counselor who has experience in working with trauma that you trust. Talk with them. Work with them. And remember, the sooner you seek help, the better.

### About the Author

Larry E. Quicksall is a Marriage & Family Therapist and founder of Christian Counseling Associates of Effingham and FamilyGrowth Publishing. Larry is a professional speaker and trainer in the human services field, and you can view his website at [www.FamilyGrowth.org](http://www.FamilyGrowth.org).