

Torture and War Trauma

Information for Family Members



If a member of your family was tortured or hurt because of the civil war in your home country, you may also feel pain.

When stories of terrible events are told to you, your body may react by not feeling well. You may have medical problems and you do not know what makes them happen. Health professionals call this feeling secondary traumatization. Secondary traumatization is normal and cannot be stopped completely. However, there are things you can do to help make secondary traumatization less harmful to you.

What happens with secondary traumatization?

- You may have headaches, stomach aches, diarrhea, or pain in your muscles.
- You may feel sick quite often.
- You may not be able to sleep through the night.
- You may feel:
 - Very tired
 - Sad or wanting to be away from people
 - Forgetful or confused
 - Angry
 - Guilty because your family member suffered more than you did
 - Worried all the time about your family
 - Without hope
- You may feel that others don't understand how you feel.
- You may not feel that you can trust anyone.

All of the symptoms listed above are normal reactions to the terrible things that have happened.

In addition, if a member of your family has experienced torture or war trauma, you may be more affected by that person's experience because you have your own story of being a refugee. What has happened to him (or her) may remind you of things you do not want to remember.

The following steps can be taken to make secondary traumatization less harmful:

1. Read the list of signs and symptoms of secondary traumatization on a regular basis. Have you – or any one else – noticed any of these changes in you?
2. Take care of your health. Eat foods that are good for you, get exercise, and spend time doing things that you enjoy.
3. Spend time with family, friends, co-workers, and people in your community who are good listeners and express positive thoughts.
4. Tell a doctor, nurse, or other health professional. They may be able to help you to feel better.

It is normal to experience secondary traumatization when someone close to you has been a victim of torture and war trauma. If you need help finding resources for you or a family member, please ask someone at the agency where you obtained this brochure.