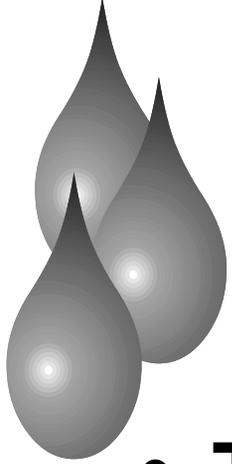


Traumatic Stress Symptoms and Grief in the Workplace

February 2003



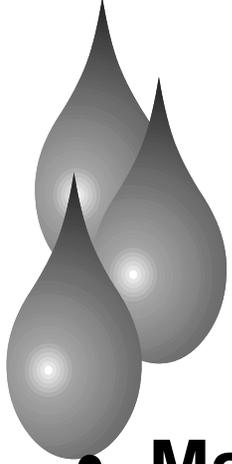
TRAUMA & GRIEF

- **Trauma**

- A distressed psychic or behavioral state resulting from mental or emotional stress, or from physical injury
- An injury to living tissue, such as a wound, caused by an external agent

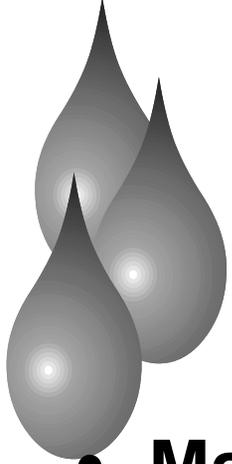
- **Grief**

- A deep and poignant distress caused by, or as if by, bereavement



TRAUMA & GRIEF

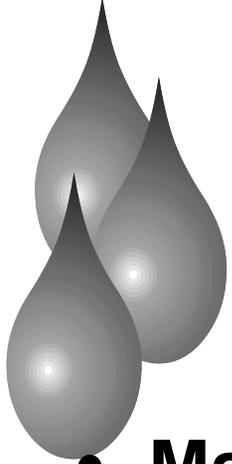
- **May occur after experiencing a sudden, overwhelming catastrophic & shocking event:**
 - Natural disaster
 - Dangerous accident
 - Terrorist attack
- **Normal & natural reactions to abnormal events that change:**
 - Our view of the world we inhabit
 - Our view of our role in that world



TRAUMA & GRIEF

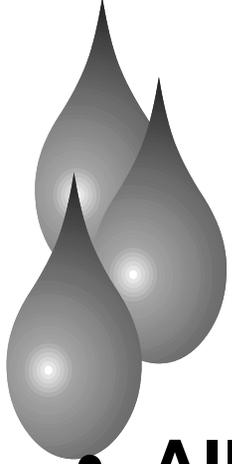
- **May be experienced as feelings of:**
 - **Shock & denial (initial response to the event)**
 - **Fear & anxiety (response to perceived danger)**
 - **Sadness or depression**
 - **Anger**
 - **Irritability or impatience**
 - **Fatigue**
 - **Helplessness or lack of control**
 - **Hopelessness & despair**
 - **Loss of interest in day-to-day activities**





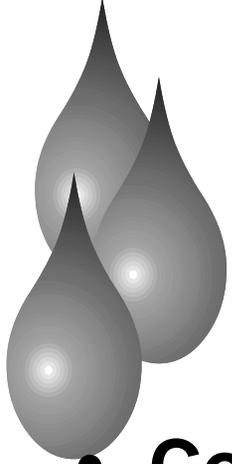
TRAUMA & GRIEF

- **May be experienced as feelings of:**
 - **Difficulty concentrating**
 - **Hard to get self started on activities**
 - **Previous priorities & values no longer matter**
 - **‘Jumpy’, nervous reactions to sounds & events**
 - **Reduced ability to predict events & outcomes**
 - **Distrust of protective systems & processes**
 - **Emotions close to the surface, barely controlled**
 - **Happiness, enjoyment & laughter seem ‘out of line’**
 - **Isolation & spiritual distance from others**



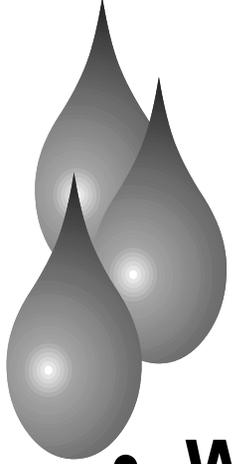
TRAUMA & GRIEF

- **All are normal reactions to catastrophic events**
- **People process emotions differently**
- **Individual reactions will vary in:**
 - **Time of onset**
 - **Intensity**
 - **Frequency**
 - **Duration**
 - **Behavioral expressions of these feelings**
 - **Impact on ability to resume 'normal' life activities**



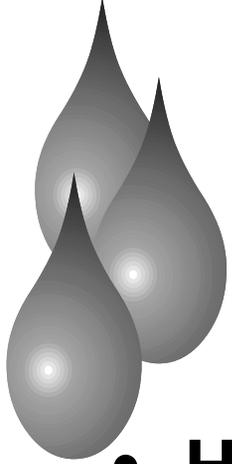
TRAUMA & GRIEF

- **Common emotional & behavioral reactions:**
 - **Delayed reactions to traumatic event**
 - **Guilt & shame for actions taken & not taken**
 - **Fear, anxiety & other feelings are triggered by sights, sounds & smells associated with the event**
 - **Re-experiencing the event through nightmares, flashbacks & unwanted thoughts**
 - **Interruption of normal sleep patterns**
 - **Avoidance of situations associated with the event**
 - **Increased use of alcohol & other substances**



Working to Cope -- Together

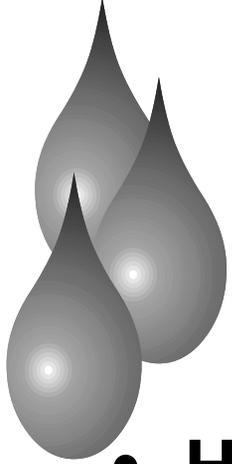
- **Ways of coping with trauma & grief vary as much as our reactions to them**
- **Effective coping strategies take time**
 - Don't expect yourself, or coworkers, to just “snap out of it”
 - Do expect some people to adjust faster than others
- **Coping means working to restore:**
 - Emotional well-being
 - A sense of control



Working to Cope -- Together

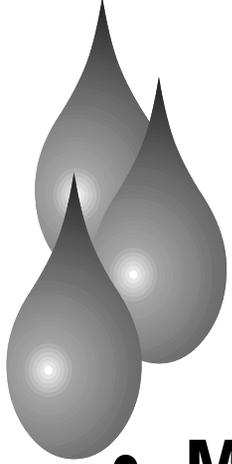
- **Help your work environment support recovery**
 - **Take time to openly discuss the event & personal reactions to it**
 - **Describing thoughts & fears aloud somehow makes them easier to manage**
 - **Acknowledge coworker concerns with compassion**
 - **Listen supportively**
 - **Your attention helps more than your words**
 - **Understand that some have a greater need to share their thoughts than others**
 - **Encourage discussions among coworkers**
 - **Have patience with repetitious discussions**





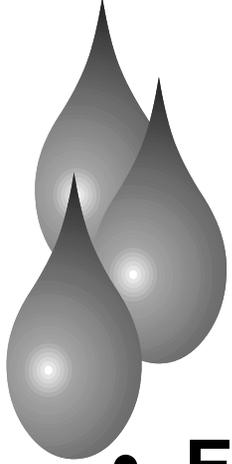
Working to Cope -- Together

- **Help your work environment support recovery**
 - **Resuming daily routines helps restore normality**
 - **Be sensitive to those not yet able to “dive right in”**
 - **Find ways people can help with the larger recovery**
 - **Making a positive contribution adds to sense of control**
 - **Review mishap & disaster plans**
 - **Feeling prepared reduces anxiety**
 - **Understanding the process reduces risk & frustration**
 - **Minimize other sources of stress where possible**
 - **Emphasize the team approach to difficult tasks**



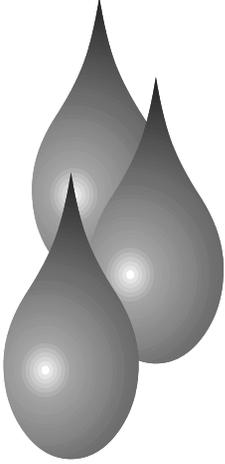
Working to Cope -- Together

- **More coping strategies**
 - Allow yourself to mourn what you've lost
 - Be patient with your changing emotional state
 - Accept support from those who care about you
 - Participate in discussion groups, if available
 - Eat well-balanced meals at regular times
 - Get plenty of rest -- try relaxation techniques
 - Establish a regular exercise time
 - Pursue hobbies & other enjoyable activities
 - Avoid making major life decisions at this time



Get Help When Needed

- **Encourage coworkers (and yourself) to get professional help if needed**
- **Seek help if traumatic stress & grief:**
 - Don't get easier to handle as time passes
 - Interfere with relationships on or off the job
 - Have a negative impact on your life activities
- **Options for help:**
 - Your employer's Employee Assistance Program
 - Professionally-led support groups
 - Spiritual mentors



Employee Assistance Programs

- **Contractors**
 - Request EAP information from your supervisor or Human Resources personnel
- **Civil Servants**
 - Dr. Bruce Mather, EAP Psychologist
 - Medical Center, Building 4249, 544-7549
 - Serves civil servants & their family members
 - Available by appointment during work week
 - Evening & weekend assistance also available:
 - Professional counseling service
 - Provides assistance with crisis events & other troubling issues
 - Call 1-888-807-7997

Remember...

- *You are not alone... you are part of the Marshall Team*
- *We are a community bonded by a shared vision*
- *Our community belongs to one NASA family*
- *The NASA family lends the strength of many to us all*
- *Our communal strength bends, but does not break, under adversity*
- *We accept great risk to achieve great benefit for all humanity*
- *Our 'family value' is to learn fully from painful lessons*
- *We use misfortune as a catalyst for self-improvement*
- *We will transform our great loss into giant progress in mankind's continued voyage into the unknown*

