A traumatic event is one that causes someone to experience unusually strong reactions, especially if the person involved feared for their life or felt they had no control over what was happening e.g.:

- A violent or sexual attack.
- The sudden or traumatic death of someone close.
- A road traffic accident — even a ‘minor’ one.
- Witnessing a horrific death or incident, even if you did not know the people involved.
- A frightening or unexpected event.
- Prolonged exposure to intense or repeated stress. This can include bullying and harassment, domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The aftershocks can occur immediately after the incident or hours, days, weeks or even months later. The symptoms can affect thinking, feeling and behaviour and feel very unnerving for all those concerned.

**SOME COMMON REACTIONS**

- **Shock:** numbness, disbelief, the experience appearing unreal with a dreamlike quality.
- **Fear:** of danger to yourself and those you love, of being left alone or having to leave loved ones, of ‘breaking down’ or ‘losing control’.
- **Sadness or Despair:** for death, injuries and losses of every kind, for the loss of belief that the world is a safe and predictable place.
Helplessness: powerlessness and vulnerability.

Anger: at what has happened, at whoever caused it or who allowed it to happen, at the injustice and senselessness of it all, at the lack of proper understanding by others, that this happened to you — ‘why me?’

Shame and Guilt: for not having done certain things you possibly could have done, for having been exposed as helpless, ‘emotional’, needing others, for not having acted or reacted as you would have wished or expected to, for surviving.

Physical Reactions: you may have physical sensations with or without the feelings described above, which may appear straight away or come some time later. For example:

- Tiredness, dizziness, muscular tension.
- Loss of memory or concentration.
- Palpitations or shakes, difficulty in breathing and/or tightness in the throat or chest.
- Nausea or diarrhoea; menstrual disorders.
- Disturbed sleep, sometimes due to intrusive memories or dreams, which may or may not correspond to the actual event.
- Lack of sexual interest.

It is important to remember that these responses are not unusual after a traumatic event. Headstart cards may help.

Counselling will help you to process the event and find ways to help you manage the symptoms.

If symptoms persist, you might also consider going to your GP.