

# STEPS

Steps Towards Empowerment & Positive Survival



## If only someone had told me!

All journeys begin with a single step



Supported by the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace

## Why this STEPS booklet is for you

We, the STEPS group, have come together as a result of our shared experiences of being caught up in many different, but tragic results of violent political conflicts. This includes bombings, deaths of family members, the trauma for soldiers and emergency services personnel, and the sufferings of physical injuries and psychological traumas etc., as a result of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'.

We have found that some support services and networks are not easily accessible.

We have found that statutory services often have little understanding of how people are affected at these times, making it difficult to seek out the support, help and understanding we should be entitled to.

We have often felt isolated and alone!

But we believe there is life after trauma and to that end we are learning to be survivors, coming through this learning journey.

Support is crucial despite very difficult circumstances.

Personal empowerment is something that can only come with patience, understanding and appropriate support.

Some of us may need to ask the what? why? where? when? and how? questions in these circumstances in order to move on.

We have created this leaflet to help you to develop the strength needed to tackle the issues you are dealing with, to attempt to signpost you to where support should be available and to reinforce the message that statutory bodies do have a duty of care to help you. Voluntary organisations and groups can and do also help.

Survival is all about taking small steps.

If only someone had told us...



## Effects of Trauma

Trauma can affect people differently and at different times. Some things can happen immediately, some in the early days and some weeks, months and even years later. We've put together a list of signs and symptoms to look out for. These are normal reactions but if you feel this is affecting your everyday life and relationships with others, you should go to see your GP or contact a support organisation (see page 7).

### THESE ARE SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS/REACTIONS

- Feeling isolated
- Nightmares/flashbacks/insomnia
- Complete change of character/personality
- Unreasonable aggressive behaviour
- Loss of or inability to sustain lasting relationships with family or friends
- Distrustful, suspicious and blaming
- Frequent periods of withdrawal into oneself
- Misuse of alcohol/drugs and/or food
- Communication problems
- Work related problems
- Feeling numb and empty
- Memory impairment
- Hyperactive or hyper-vigilant behaviour
- Feeling suicidal
- Self harm and self destructive tendencies
- Tearful for no apparent reason
- Avoidance of people and places
- Panic attacks/anxiety/depression/mood swings
- Physical illness e.g. irritable bowel syndrome
- Being frightened/overprotective of your safety
- Poor concentration



## Tips for looking after yourself

Try to be kind to yourself and do whatever it is that you feel like doing at the time. See friends/family if that helps; don't see friends/family if that helps; try and find somebody that you can talk to in a safe environment i.e. somebody that you trust or an agency like the Samaritans, but only if you feel it will help you; do see your doctor if you feel you are not coping; try not to feel obliged or bullied into doing anything that you don't feel like doing, no matter how well meaning friends and family are, don't feel that they know best - you know (though you temporarily may have forgotten) what is best for you. Remember, your feelings are real and they are 'normal'. Above all try and give yourself time; time to heal, time to acknowledge what has happened to you, time off work if you feel it will help, taking time out to rest adequately and that you or somebody close to you helps you with everyday things.

- Give yourself permission and TIME to grieve
- Focus on your strengths and coping skills
- Ask for support and help from your family, friends, church or other community resources. Join or develop support groups
- Redefine your priorities and focus your energy and resources on those priorities
- Set small realistic goals to help tackle obstacles. For example, re-establish daily routines for yourself and your family
- Use creativity to express your feelings, writing poems, painting, playing an instrument, dancing
- Remember that you are not alone
- Remember that you're experiencing normal reactions to an abnormal situation
- Explore new experiences, hobbies, volunteering, etc
- Talk to people; talk is a healing method
- Accept support from loved ones, friends and neighbours. People do care
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten. You're suffering from stress. Don't make any big life changes immediately. During periods of extreme stress we all tend to make misjudgements

Here are some practical activities that have helped us; they may be useful for you:

Listening to music, Cooking, Gardening, Exercise, Alternative Therapies, Sport, Reading, Painting, Massage, Shopping, DIY, Watch TV or don't watch TV, Relaxing bath, Pets, Crying, Shouting, Relaxation, Chilling Out, Being with Nature, and any other activity that helps you relax.



## Overcoming barriers

When looking for the necessary support and resources you may experience obstacles and difficulties as we have done. Some guidance from our experience may be useful:

- Finding solutions will be a journey involving several different experiences and experts along the way
- Trust yourself that you will know what is right for you
- You are the expert about your experience
- Be aware that you may have to repeat your story over and over again in different ways to a variety of people
- Know that it is courageous to ask for help
- Don't expect too much of yourself, don't try to get things back to how they were before
- Be aware that professionals are human and can be wrong and may not have all the answers
- When seeing a professional it is useful to take a friend with you. Prepare questions before you go and if you don't understand, ask for clarification
- If you don't trust the information given to you, go elsewhere
- Know that some people around you also have their own needs
- There is no better measure of how well we are doing other than knowing we are doing our best. So stop judging yourself
- Try to focus on solutions instead of problems
- Be careful that language and jargon doesn't confuse you or drag you down
- Don't be worried about challenging professionals
- Remember that you are not alone
- Each day is different – some days you may feel different and not understand why
- Try to stay positive and look after yourself
- Try to keep your life simple



## Duty of Care

Appropriate statutory bodies have a **duty of care** to support people following incidents. This may be the NHS, Social Services, the MOD, Police, Department of Work and Pensions (or others). You should check to see what help is available. We have reproduced part of the Department of Justice Code of Practice for Victims of Crime as an example:

“The Government aims to ensure that every victim, including relatives of people who have died, as a result of terrorism, criminal activities, etc., have access to information and are offered emotional and practical support. Terrorism is also known as criminal activities.

Civilians caught up in conflicts, suffering, loss, physical injuries and/or psychological injuries, etc, should expect to receive the following:

- A right to information within a specified time limit
- A dedicated Police Family Liaison Officer assigned to bereaved relatives to support them
- Information and/or referral to Victim Support and/or any other relevant organisation
- Flexibility, with regard to 'opting in or out' of receiving services to ensure victims receive the level of service they feel ready to accept or want
- An enhanced service in the cases of vulnerable victims or intimidated victims
- Clear information from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) regarding eligibility for compensation under the scheme”

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/victims/Victims-rights](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/victims/Victims-rights)

However . . . STEPS have found that individual experiences may be vastly different for a variety of reasons.

- NHS treatment and medical treatment should be available as required
- Medical interventions, support services, etc., do need to be offered with some understanding of one's vulnerability at these times. They need to be relevant to the individual victim's needs, and being dealt with sensitively can also help.
- Relatives of those killed or injured abroad, should be able to receive guidance and support from the relevant British Consuls

### Military related incidents

You can also access:

- Practical support and information about other sources of help from the service charities such as TRBL, SSAFA, Combat Stress, BLESMA, etc
- Referrals and signposting to Veterans Agency (War Pensions)

### Emergency Services personnel

- Help from your welfare department



## Support Organisations

Here are some organisations that you might find useful; however, experiences of services may vary as does local provision. NHS Direct, your GP or the Citizens Advice Bureau are usually a good first point of call. Don't give up!

**NHS Direct** Tel: 0845 46 47 Website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

**CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau)** Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)  
(the website lists all the local offices with contact details)

**7th July Assistance Centre** Tel: 0845 054 7444 Website: [www.7julyassistance.org.uk](http://www.7julyassistance.org.uk)

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** Tel: 0845 769 7555 Website: [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

**ASSIST Trauma Care** Tel: 01788 560800 Email: [assist@traumatic-stress.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:assist@traumatic-stress.freereserve.co.uk)

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**  
Tel: 0870 443 5252 Website: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

**Carers UK** Tel: 0808 808 7777 Website: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

**The Child Bereavement Trust** Tel: 0845 357 1000 Website: [www.childbereavementtrust.org.uk](http://www.childbereavementtrust.org.uk)

**Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority** Tel: 0800 358 3601 Website: [www.cica.gov.uk](http://www.cica.gov.uk)

**Cruse Bereavement Care**  
Tel: 08444 779400 (Mon-Fri 9-5) Website: [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

**DIAL UK (Disability Information & Advice)** Tel: 01302 310123 Website: [www.dialuk.info](http://www.dialuk.info)

**Disaster Action** Tel: 01483 799 066 Website: [www.disasteraction.org.uk](http://www.disasteraction.org.uk)

**Drug Scope** Tel: 0207 928 1211 Website: [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk)

**Ex Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress)**  
Tel: 01372 841600 Website: [www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk)

**Foreign & Commonwealth Office** Tel: 0207 008 1500 Website: [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

**MINDInfoline (Mental Health)** Tel: 0845 766 0163 Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**Narcotics Anonymous** Tel: 0845 373 3366 Website: [www.ukna.org](http://www.ukna.org)

**The Samaritans** Tel: 08457 90 90 90 Website: [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

**Shelter** Tel: 0808 800 4444 Website: [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

**SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)**  
Tel: 0870 241 3337 (9am-9pm) Website: [www.sobs.admin.care4free.net](http://www.sobs.admin.care4free.net)

**SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association)**  
Tel: 0845 1300 975 Website: [www.ssafa.org.uk](http://www.ssafa.org.uk)

**Support After Murder & Manslaughter** Tel: 020 7735 3838 Website: [www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk)

**Telephone Helpline Association** Tel: 0845 120 3767 Website: [www.helplines.org.uk](http://www.helplines.org.uk)

**Veterans Agency** Tel: 0800 169 2277 Website: [www.veteransagency.mod.uk](http://www.veteransagency.mod.uk)

**Victim Support** Tel: 0845 30 30 900 Website: [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)



## Steps Towards Empowerment & Positive Survival

STEPS was created by a group of victims, survivors and veterans affected by the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', who had been involved with the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace's Legacy Project. One of the Project's tasks was to create an Advocacy Group where victims / survivors would have the chance to explore their own experiences and needs and identify what could be done for others.

After this exploration we felt one of our common experiences was 'if only somebody had told us what to expect' and hence the idea for the STEPS leaflet was born.

- We hope that STEPS will in the future assist victims and survivors of violent conflicts and enable them to take control of their well being, moving forward towards their inner peace and a better quality of life
- STEPS hope to raise awareness, across Government Departments and other agencies, of the issues surrounding violent conflict and the damaging after effects caused to people. STEPS will act as a voice to help bring about change

We the STEPS Group would like to acknowledge the help and support The Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace has given to individual members of our group and for enabling us to put this leaflet together. We also endorse the valuable work of the Foundation.

"Life is not the way it's supposed to be, it's the way it is.  
The way you cope with it is what makes the difference."

*Virginia Satir, in Reeves, A 'Recovery: An Holistic Approach', 1998, Handsell*

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