

# **SUPPORTING**

*Issue One* **OURSELVES**



**Activist  
Trauma  
Support**

*Personal Stories  
Practical Info  
Political Issues*



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# SUPPORTING OURSELVES

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# EDITORIAL

This Zine has been produced by the UK group Activist Trauma Support (ATS), for the G8 in Germany 07. It is the first version of what may become an on-going work in progress - whether that happens or not is up to you? We're currently planning a second version for the UK Climate Camp 07 and we want to include your stories and articles about these issues.

(mail submissions to [activist\\_trauma@riseup.net](mailto:activist_trauma@riseup.net))

ATS was started in 2005 in order to provide support during and after the G8 mobilisations in Scotland. Previous experiences have shown that while self-organised medical support for victims of police violence was quite sorted, there was a serious lack of assistance on a psychological level.

For some, the idea for ATS was born from experiences following the Aubonne bridge action against the G8 in Evian 2003. During that action one person was seriously injured physically - and got lots of support. But several others suffered from varying degrees of psychological trauma and didn't get the kind of emotional support that they needed and deserved. This is when it was realised that there was a pressing need for organised awareness raising, information and support.

While this initial impetus was focused upon post traumatic stress, it soon became apparent that there was a host of other related issues, which also needed to be addressed. Things such as burnout and sustainable activism, debriefings that factored in the emotional components of taking part in an action.

The response we have received from the people that we have engaged with has clearly demonstrated that there is a big need for

this kind of work, and for our communities to be aware of and able to deal with these kinds of issues.

At Climate Camp 2007 it was apparent that the presence of the Wellbeing Space helped to ease tensions on the site; even among those who had no need to actually make use of it, there seemed to be a general feeling that it was good that we were looking after our own. On top of this it seemed to become more acceptable for people to ask each other how they were feeling or how they were coping.

The fact that there is a need for this kind of work also seems to be emphasised by the number of 'trauma' groups who have flourished within the international activist community in the last 18 months.

It seems quite easy to take on a macho approach with regard to activism: on the one hand there is the more obvious need to speak the most in meetings, but on the other hand it all too often manifests in the idea that 'I can handle it', no matter what or how much of 'it' comes your way.

Putting our own wellbeing, and also that of those we are working with, in last place, after the movement, the cause, our affinity group and our other commitments is no way to build lasting and sustainable movements.

In this sense there is a great need for us to support each other and for us to provide emotional support within our communities; both are essential tools for the effectiveness of our movements.

We need to look after each other, we need to support ourselves.

## **AVOIDING BURNOUT AT CLIMATE CAMP 2006**

Following on from my role in setting up and maintaining the 'eco-village' at Stirling during the 2005 G8 protests, I ended up a physical and emotional wreck that took over 6 frustrating months to recover from. The eco-village was three weeks of intense work, little sleep and less food due to the amount of responsibilities we all had. It was a great success but it came at massive personal cost.

The Climate Camp threatened to be a repeat of this, but I have come out of it without the same degree of burn-out and though it is early yet, feel that in some way I have 'survived' it. A more suitable way of putting it would be to say that I have survived my own instincts and drives to work too much, so pushing myself past boundaries.

This is not to say that I did not reach those boundaries, but the toll of doing that did not cost so much. I had learnt the lessons of Stirling and applied them well, despite it looking like I was going to fall into all the old mistakes once again at various points along the way.

The biggest lesson was to get rid of those tasks I physically could not do. This required me accepting a large amount of stuff on trust, something hard for me to do in general. I had to let people go away and make mistakes, because I was not there to do it myself. Reminding myself that was how I had learnt helped lots. When you throw yourself heart and soul into a project it is often very hard to let go. Convincing yourself that you can is important; and that it is better to take on one job and do it well so that everyone else is confident that it is being done well.

Another aspect of the Climate Camp was the presence of the Wellbeing Space and the general awareness of the issues of burn-out, initiated for a large part by the presence of Activist Trauma Support during the 2005 G8 and again at the Climate Camp. It made it much more natural to talk about it and to recognise it. It took away a degree of ego and macho-ness and meant people were more aware of the issue in general. It meant that I could march people to bed for the sake of their sanity and health; and likewise they did it for me. Stepping back and actively watching for burn-out in my friends (helps to think of it as benefiting the event as well) made me more aware of the issue in myself.

### **Other small things played significant roles:**

Better quality meetings went a long way - when meetings were bad and unfocused I noticed my stress levels rising greatly. Also people taking over small jobs, even if just temporarily, helped.

Having people ensure that we were fed and given cups of tea, and not just doing that, but making us sit down and relax over them - actively telling people to go away if they try to interrupt, or having others do it for you is so important.

Actually enjoying being there, and having the moments of space to reach that nice feeling - often as simple as pausing to chat to friends. Hugs are a very important bit of reassurance.

Telling people to stop panicking over the slightest events and thus stopping a general undercurrent of hysteria and urgency - particular relevant to me in my role in dealing with the police.

Removing the sense of impending doom and urgency is a big factor as these feelings drive you so much in this sort of situation - as the

saying goes, accept the things you cannot change and have the wisdom to know what they are.

Last year I would have freaked if I had left the eco-village, I had so entangled my personal self with it; leaving the site would have only increased my worried and thus my stress. This year leaving for a day and having a bath did me wonders. Realising I could have personal space and the world would not fall apart without me was great. Rather than taking on loads of aspects, it was accepting that I had done what was realistically possible, and made my ego accept that I am not omnipotent, a difficult but worthwhile lesson. I was able to go back with renewed energy that kept me going and help take some burdens off of others.

This year, I took time out, and paid a visit to the Wellbeing Space and had a neck message: you can't function when your back is a massive knot of stress that is burrowing into your skull. When it hurts that much then you need to stop, regardless, and nobody is going to criticise you for it - or if they do, then they are grade A wankers who probably need to chill out themselves before they damage others as much as they do themselves.

I was far from perfect and some of the above lessons were learnt only while I was in the field, but they worked for me, someone who is quite ready to burnout in the name of what I am doing. I want to be an activist for the rest of my life, not to be another bright burst of energy followed by hollowness. In 14 years of being active, a strong lesson I have learnt is that campaigning is a war of attrition and those who can take the most blows are those that generally win - hard punches are temporary and need to happen at the right time to be successful. To be able to take that war of attrition and win out then we need to prepare ourselves for the long haul, physically and mentally.

# TOTAL ECLIPSE

*I don't know what is happening to me. The world around me collapsed. I have lost it. This will never be over. It will always stay like this. I will never be able to dance again. I will never be happy again. I will never love again. I will never laugh again. My world is pain and tears. My world is loneliness. My world is a black tower in a dark sea. My life is gone. Is this life still worth living? Loneliness. Pain, deeper than ever before. Why don't I just go? Why don't I just stop moving in the middle of the street. Looking down the bridges. I could make it stop. Make this nightmare be over. So lonely, so lonely. I am alone. Alone in this sea of pain, alone with my screams. It nearly tears me apart. Nobody cares. I am scared of people. Can't face seeing anybody. Hiding away. What if they ask how I am doing and I don't know what to say. There are no words, only tears and screams. I can't scream my pain in your face. So I hide. My house is not my house anymore. How did my friends turn into people I am scared off? I don't dare to leave my room. The risk to meet somebody on the corridor is too high. I am alone and I will never be happy again. Something else has taken control over me. A black ghost follows my steps and whenever he feels like, he throws me on the floor. It can happen any moment. I don't dare to go out anymore. I can lose it any moment and end up crying and winding in cramps on the floor. What if that happens on the street? I rather stay in my bed. What is there for me to do anyway? Nothing makes sense anymore. I cry. Cry like I have never cried before. Something is tearing my stomach out of my body. I nearly puke. I am not myself anymore. I am everybody. Every prisoner. Every body beaten up by the police. Every body who gets tortured. This feeling does not stop. Weeks, and weeks. I feel ashamed. I don't want to appear weak. I don't want to admit what they did to us had such an impact on me. I was this strong woman. Now I am nothing. Nobody shall see me like this.*

Now it is over. It is a few years ago but writing this I still nearly puke. It was the worst time of my life. When I read it, it sounds crazy. But it was so real. I felt like in a film. I know now that I was not alone. My partner was next to me at all times. I was the loneliest person on the planet. Sounds absurd - how can you not see somebody who is next to you. The word 'friend' made me cry, I did not have any. People cared and worried about me. But I did not see them.

Everything that makes life worthwhile was taken out and pain injected in that dark hole. Loneliness was the worst feeling and the loss of joy.

It took months to pass. I went to see a therapist, she thought that I was doing political actions because I was suicidal. In the state I was in, I believed her everything and paid her 50 euros an hour (adding up to 400 euros) rather than telling her to fuck off. Finally I met a social worker "from us", X. He told me to cry every day for 10 minutes at a certain time that I should decide upon in the morning. And when the alarm goes after ten minutes - get up and get on with life. Sounds crazy but helped. This is how I gained control over my life and my tears again. The feeling that the black ghost could attack me from behind at any given moment diminished.

I needed to control everything. Prepared myself for 2 hours before leaving the house. Making sure nothing could go wrong. I could not do anything. Not work, not cook, not clean and I felt guilty for not contributing. How crazy, I think now. I had serious PTSD and was feeling guilty for not washing up. This is the problem with wounds you can't see. If I had had a broken leg I would not have felt guilty or ashamed.

I could not ask for help. I could not tell anybody what was going

on for me, apart from my partner. Scared of asking too much, scared of feeling being let down by people or disappointed. Rather stay alone.

I was scared of cops, not directly, but they provoked flashbacks and I would see everything happening again. X told me to ask every week three of them for directions. The first time it took me an hour to approach the cop. He did not try to kill me. Slowly I reprogrammed my brain.

I took bach flowers (natural remedies) that were mixed especially for me every two weeks. I think they helped.

I studied, made me feel that I did something useful with my shit time, gave me some sense and was something that could not go wrong. A book will not attack you or let you down.

Before the trial a year after it happened I had some therapy sessions because I was scared that I would freak out in court when I saw the fuckers who nearly killed us. I had EMDR sessions (a special form of trauma therapy). This stuff was great for me. Fast, direct, just me with my experiences without being distracted too much by the therapist. I was calm in court.

What would I have needed? A big social centre to come back to with a huge group of people coming and going was not the best place to come back to. I would have needed a safe space with a small intimate group of people I could relate to and trust and who cared about me. And I would have needed professional help straight away, from somebody who respected my background and who had experience in trauma therapy. And I would have needed more information. Only after weeks of despair I searched on the internet about information on trauma and found a checklist with symptoms where I could tick nearly all. Why had nobody thought

of it and got more info? There was a name for what I had. I was not going crazy. I was relieved. I did not need to feel ashamed, it was normal. Knowing did not make it go away, but it made it bearable. What I had was something real, it was something like an illness and there were ways out of this hell.

I am back to life now. Can go to demos again. Took a while, but I am back. Not quite doing actions again. Still steps to go... I learnt lots. About myself. About people. About our struggle. What I lived made me stronger. I know who I am and what I believe in. I know what I am fighting for. I know I am strong and I know it is also okay for me to feel weak at times. I know we are right and we are not alone.

Let's never give up

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# **INTERNATIONAL GROUPS ADDRESSING ACTIVIST TRAUMA**

Since the inception of Activist Trauma Support, in the UK in 2005, several other international groups have also been set up. These include the German group Out Of Action and the Israeli T-Team.

## **OUT OF ACTION - EMOTIONAL FIRST AID**

mail@outofaction.net - www.outofaction.net

### **Who we are**

We are a country wide collective, which sat down with the goal of highlighting the psychological effects of political activism while also developing structures for support. We orient ourselves to the work of the Activist trauma support group which began in England in 2005, however we are not the same group.

### **Out of Action self understanding**

Political Events, e.g. summit protests can lead to increased stress and also to increased levels of repression. The goal of this repression is to intimidate and disempower people. In due course this can develop into Trauma, which can lead to people with political connections withdrawing themselves from the movement. It is important to develop an awareness of this process of repressive force in order to support each other and to be able to resist mutually, instead of trying to cope alone.

While medical first aid assistance and legal assistance have so far generally been well organized for protests against the G8-Summits, they have lacked psychological support. The idea for Activist trauma support developed during the G8-Summit 2003 in Evian. Two years later in Scotland such assistance was available for

the first time. In the Eco Village in Stirling an area was created for talking, listening, and resting. From this start the trauma support group for the G8-Summit 2007 in Holy Dam was brought into being.

We want to offer emotional first aid "locally with the political protests". We will make a tent available, in which you can come for support during the G8-Summit in Holy Dam. To visit us you don't necessarily have to have experienced a "glaring Action", it can also be simply that at times (for whatever reasons) you badly need a calm place.

### **Who is Out Of Action and what do we mean by "emotional support"?**

Out of Action means emotional support for Activists by Activists. We understand our group as a part of the structures of anti-repression and the international Activist trauma network of support. Our wish is to inform about and thus prevent the various and sometimes long-term psychological consequences of repression. We work on the basis of providing long-term structures of support.

Physical wounds usually draw lots of attention and often become medals of bravery. But psychological wounds are in just as much need of treatment. Often people with emotional difficulties are stigmatised as "too weak". But these experiences are not a private problem. It is important for us to highlight and remove the taboos surrounding the issue of "trauma". Our goal is to make this possible and to provide support on a long-term basis in a political capacity that facilitates action.

It is time for us to care for each other - not alone, not in private, but together, in solidarity, as a movement!

# **ISRAELI ACTIVIST TRAUMA TEAM**

## **Shalom/Salaam from Al Quds!**

The group has 8 committed members, and we have translated the PTS leaflet into Hebrew and arabic. We have organised ten trainings for the group over the next month, which includes an introduction to trauma from the director of the Rape Crisis centre in Tel Aviv, counselling and listening skills and first aid/herbal first aid. We are also having a bonding weekend at the beginning of June...

We are all hoping to take this work forward to both israeli, palestinian and international activists active in non-violent resistance to the Occupation. There has been some resistance as the activist culture is very macho (except for the queers!), and there is little acknowledgement of the issue. We are also looking into how we can work with the ISM.

Update: The Israeli t-team isn't really functioning as a collective at the moment since group members are currently dispersed all over the country or are overseas, but we hope to re-invigorate it soon.

**E-mail: [t-team@riseup.net](mailto:t-team@riseup.net)**

## **REPORT FROM THE ISRAELI T - TEAM**

August 2007

The trauma team in Israel is dealing with some serious shit right now. On top of the War and all the anti-war demos, the Queeruption 9 went ahead this week with over 70 visiting internationals. The week was jam-packed with amazing activities and activism - but its been both beautiful and terrible.

The police attacked the Gay Pride vigil in Jerusalem on Thursday

because someone had a Lebanese flag (well it did turn into a bit of a spontaneous anti-war rally), and the mainstream gay community totally condemned the 'anarchists', and watched from a distance as we got beaten up.

Yesterday at the weekly protest against the Wall being build in Bil'in in Palestine, the police fired rubber bullets on the large crowd of over 250 Israelis, Palestinians and internationals even before the demo began, and resulted in 4 serious injuries including an Israeli lawyer who was shot in the head at close range and is in a critical condition - the extent of his brain damage is not clear at this stage. Other people were chased and beaten up.

On top of this all the usual stress, interpersonal conflicts, sleep deprivation, general 'war' tension, personal emotional issues, someone's family getting a kutyusha through their ceiling, excessive drinking and all night partying...

I've spent the last few days trying to send the organisers home to sleep, and many are crashing. Unfortunately, many of the main Q9 organisers were also involved in the t-team. We've also organised several emotional sharing circles and one-on-one sessions for the internationals many of whom are in total shock at the violence, as well as dealing with the culture shock.

We have hebrew, arabic and english leaflets which we also handed out at the Bil'in demo and they have almost all gone. T. has been here doing the NADA acupuncture which has been a success. Its going to be a real project picking up the pieces in the coming weeks. I hope you don't have to deal with anything this full on at the Climate camp.

love 'n' rage, L. x x

# **ATS TRAUMA BRIEFING**

## **What is trauma?**

If you or your friends have experienced or witnessed police violence (or violence from anyone else), if you have been arrested, if what happens in actions brings up old memories,

Trauma has two common meanings. One refers to serious bodily injury, the second is an experience which shocks and has a lasting mental effect. These experiences can be, for example, being attacked by the police, raped, mugged, a serious accident, child abuse, the sudden unexpected death of a loved one, or witnessing a traumatic event.

One of the amazing things about activists is that we often deliberately expose ourselves to brutality when we believe it necessary. What is sometimes equally surprising is how little we know about the psychological effects of this violence. We need to prepare ourselves and learn how to support each other through the physical and emotional consequences of trauma.

## **What is post-traumatic stress?**

The body responds to a traumatic event by releasing adrenaline, a hormone that prepares the body to flee or fight. Adrenaline and another chemical norepinephrine stimulate the amygdale, a structure deep in our brain that spurs the formation of vivid, emotional memories of the threat. In evolutionary terms, that is a good survival strategy - for example, putting a hunter on high alert if she later nears the same cave where an animal attacked her.

After a trauma this can take a while to settle down as you (your mind and body) process what happened to you. This is called post

traumatic stress (PTS) or post trauma syndrome.

People's reactions to traumatic events vary enormously; some may become withdrawn, others may be tearful or angry. Some people experience no ill-effects at all. If you've had a traumatic experience, you may experience strong physical and/or emotional reactions. These are common and a normal part of coming to terms with your experiences. Sometimes reactions happen immediately after the traumatic event, sometimes they might appear hours or days later. Sometimes they can appear weeks or months afterwards. Remember that these symptoms are natural reactions to very disturbing situations, and some of these symptoms are attempts of your body and your brain trying to protect you.

**If you've been in a situation, you might experience some of the following things:**

**Emotional:**

fear  
sadness  
helplessness  
feeling numb  
anxiety  
uncertainty  
grief  
guilt  
depression  
feeling overwhelmed  
loss of emotional control  
irritability  
intense anger with self or others  
shame

## **Thoughts:**

confusion or mental fuzziness;  
poor attention and concentration;

poor problem-solving;

poor decision-making;

memory problems;

disorientation

disturbing thoughts;

flashbacks and intrusive images;

avoidance of thinking;

disturbed sleep or nightmares,

panic attacks,

hyper-vigilance,

paranoia

blaming others or yourself

unable to understand own reactions

Behaviour:

withdrawal

tearfulness and emotional outbursts

apathy/loss of interest in life

restlessness

hyper-alertness/easily startled

a loss or increase in appetite

increased tobacco/alcohol or other drug consumption

increased use of medication

change in sexual functioning

altered sleep patterns

strained relationships

increased accidents

avoidance of places, people or situations

reluctance to discuss the event or wanting to talk

about it all the time

apparent personality change or anti-social behaviour.

## **Physical:**

Fatigue

Nausea

Dizziness

chest pain

elevated blood pressure

difficulty breathing

sweating

teeth-grinding

irregularities of heartbeat

muscle tremors

menstrual changes

feeling faint

stomach upsets

diarrhoea

muscular tension leading to head, neck or backache.

## **What if I'm experiencing these reactions?**

Its important to remember that post-trauma stress reactions are a NORMAL reaction to an ABNORMAL EVENT. It might be pretty scary, but you are not going crazy, you are not 'not coping'. If you think of it like having a meal - your stomach needs time to break down the food. When you've been through a scary and upsetting experience, your mind and body needs to break it down and make sense of it.

Its important to not fight it, but to understand that its all part of a process of recovery.

## **These are some ideas that may help:**

Remember to breathe. Even three deep breaths will help.

It is important that you don't compare yourself to others. Everyone is an individual and everyone has their own experience. There are a number of reasons why people react differently to the same, or similar events.

Emotional turmoil is to be expected. It may feel overwhelming at times, this may reflect adjustments your body and mind needs to make to heal yourself. Try to rest more, even if you can't sleep. The body and mind repair when resting.

Make time for relaxation. Breathing exercises, meditation and yoga can be very useful.

If possible, continue with regular exercise; exercise and relaxation will help you reduce nervous tension and feeling 'hyped up'. If you are unsure about whether you should exercise because of physical injuries, seek advice from a medical professional. Sometimes you will want to be alone, but try not to become too isolated as distressing feelings can appear greater when you are by yourself.

Reduce your intake of stimulants such as tea, coffee, cola, chocolate and spicy, hot food as these can make you feel more uptight.

Avoid street drugs and alcohol; numbing or suppressing feelings and unusual physical sensations may create problems in the future. You may be tempted to increase your use of tobacco, but try to resist this.

Treat yourself to things you normally enjoy.

Identify when your mood is low and do something about it.

Don't let gloomy or negative thoughts get the better of you - stop

them and replace them with counter arguments. What would you say to a friend to challenge them if they thought that way?

It can be helpful to distract yourself from negative thoughts. Study something in detail - the shape of a flower, buttons on a shirt etc

Continue to talk to your affinity group, your family, friends and others in your life about your trauma, your reactions and feelings as this will help you master your distressing symptoms. Even if you feel detached from other people, don't reject their support. Talking to people about what happened can help you make sense of it

Write down details of flashbacks or nightmares you experience.

Remind yourself why you're doing this and what you have achieved

Dealing with uncomfortable feelings

You don't have to feel everything at once - you can deal with unpleasant feelings and memories one at a time.

Feeling this bad can be very unpleasant, but try not to overreact when feelings seem 'out of control' or overwhelming.

Give yourself permission to 'feel lousy' from time to time, after all you have been through a difficult experience; also give yourself permission to distract yourself with pleasant activities.

Try not to act on unpleasant feelings and make major life decisions until you have recovered from the trauma - your judgement may be impaired.

Feelings are strongly influenced by thoughts and beliefs; by monitoring your negative thoughts/beliefs and evaluating their

usefulness to you in your recovery, you can begin to master unpleasant emotions.

Writing down thoughts in a diary or writing letters you may not send can almost be as good as talking about them.

Identifying negative and self-defeating thoughts can lead to mastering them and enable you to think straighter and more rationally.

Distraction techniques can help you gain control over unwanted recurrent thoughts that are disturbing/distressing. For example, using a thought stopping technique such as saying 'STOP' silently to yourself whenever a troublesome intrusive thought enters your mind.

### **What is PTSD?**

Most people recover from trauma within a few weeks. However, some 20-30% of people exposed to trauma develop a range of symptoms which the mental health system calls Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This diagnosis applies when stress symptoms do not disappear after a month or so. Effective treatments for PTSD are available.

PTSD is diagnosed when there has been exposure to a stressor and where there is a set of symptoms that have persisted for more than a month. These stressors are, for example, being attacked by the police, raped, mugged, a serious accident, child abuse, the sudden unexpected death of a loved one, or witnessing a traumatic event. Recently, therapists have also begun to talk about 'complex PTSD' where the person has been exposed to a series of repeated stressors rather than a single one - for example previous (childhood) trauma plus being attacked by the police.

## **What causes PTSD?**

PTSD happens when your system doesn't settle after a trauma - kind of going overboard. In that case, memories and environmental cues provoke out-of proportion fear responses to ordinary situations and your everyday functioning is impaired.

## **Why do some people recover from a trauma while others don't?**

The following factors appear to make it more likely that a person will develop PTSD:

The more severe the trauma

The longer it lasted

The closer the person was to it

The more dangerous it seemed

The more times the person has been traumatised in the past if the trauma was inflicted deliberately by other people (eg. police and prison officer brutality)

If the person gets negative reactions from friends and relatives - which is why it's so important to support each other more effectively the longer it took to get into safe/supported

Circumstances afterwards - the first minutes and hours can make a massive difference.

What can I do to minimise the chance of being traumatised?

Be prepared. Being aware of potential violence will reduce the shock-factor.

Understand that planned violence is a strategy used by the police and armed forces to suppress and contain civil actions.

Some activists use meditation, martial arts, other eastern disciplines (like tai chi, chi gung) to help prepare for, and recover from, events where there may be trauma. They can help ground you, give you focus, confidence, and help you defend yourself, physically and mentally.

If an action/demo is coming where there may be traumatic events, plan your support and a debriefing session afterwards. Plan to do nice stuff afterwards, and take time off. Encourage your group to do this also.

Emotional awareness in preparatory group meetings is important, to enable people to talk through their feelings.

Knowledge of post-traumatic stress is important, because if traumatic events occur, you will be better supported by people who already know about PTS, and you will be better able to help others.

Good immediate support will help lessen the symptoms or even onset of PTSD.

Taking vigorous exercise immediately after may help to release stored-up adrenalin.

On the day, bear in mind the 'golden hour' which medics speak of, as that may also be the vital time for limiting the emotional impact of a trauma. In the minutes, hours, and day/s after a trauma, assist a trauma survivor to:

Get somewhere safe and calm

Be cared for medically and/or homeopathically,

Eat and drink good food stay warm - one of the body's responses to shock is to feel very cold

Be listened to

Not be left alone

Know what has happened to friends/family, and know any children will be cared for

Know that support will be available for the next few days to safely

experience whatever emotions may arise

Not take on new responsibilities and have old obligations taken away for the time being.

An activist's immediate response to trauma may well be - 'I'm fine, leave me alone, I have to go and rescue my friends/ throw myself back into the fray/ go to work in a couple of hours/ single-handedly look after my children/ do prisoner support/ attend the big post-protest party'

These may be the choices that make the difference between taking a month or ten years to recover from the trauma. Discuss the right response to trauma in advance, with our friends, action groups, and communities, and attempt to commit in advance to the appropriate response, regardless of how 'fine' we feel at the time.

### **What Can Families And Friends Do To Help?**

The support of friends and families is enormously important, and cannot be overstated. (Lack of support and understanding, on the other hand, contributes to the persistence of trauma.)

Don't expect a traumatized person to recover quickly. Some will, but some won't be able to do that. If someone is taking a long time to recover from a crisis, offer your support repeatedly, so that they do not feel alone. But be respectful, don't push them.

A traumatized person may have symptoms which are very hard for those around them to deal with, for example anger or withdrawal. Bear in mind that the traumatized person is not deliberately acting this way: it is the trauma which makes them behave like this. Don't take it personally but recognize it as a symptom and as a sign that

they need your support.

### **Things you can do include:**

Be a good listener.

Spend normal time with them, especially in the early days following the event;

Offer support and assistance even when they have not asked for it;

Reassure them that they are safe, that distressing symptoms will pass and that these reactions are understandable given what they have experienced. One of the most important things you can do is to give the message: 'You are not to blame - and you are not alone. This is normal and it will pass.'

Don't tell them to get over it. People are tempted, time and time again, to encourage the person to stop reliving and simply forget about the trauma and get on with life. Unfortunately, this seemingly reasonable advice is usually not helpful in this situation and is likely to make things worse, as it may make the person feel even more isolated and hopeless.

The person may need to talk about the traumatic events over and over again, and one of the best things family members and friends can do is to be patient and sympathetic listeners so the person feels less alone.

It may be the case that the person doesn't want to talk about it, in which case don't force them because they might shut down on you.

Don't take their anger or moodiness personally. It is also important to have realistic expectations while the person is recovering and not to expect too much or too little from the person. Encourage your loved one to join a PTSD support group. Learn about the disorder and encourage the person to stick with treatment even if

it is painful. Offer practical help, like cooking, childcare, shopping.

Also, when the symptoms of PTSD are over, it is important to help the person to reintegrate into an active life.

## **Can't Sleep?**

Remember that sleep difficulties are a very normal reaction to trauma and you are 'being normal'. Worrying about sleeping makes it harder to fall asleep. It's the stress and worry that makes you feel bad, rather than the lack of sleep. Here's some things that have worked for other people:

Resist stimulants. These include coffee, tea, chocolate, cola, spicy food, tobacco and exciting TV.

Don't go to bed on an empty or overfull stomach.

Make sure your bedroom environment is comfy. Cooler is better than warmer and not too noisy.

If possible, resolve arguments or problems before you go to bed.

List all the worries that you have just before you go to bed. Tell yourself that you know what they are and that you can come back to them in the morning.

Learn a self-hypnosis technique to induce sleep.

Try some yoga breathing or meditation close to bedtime.

Don't use bed as a place to worry. Set yourself a worry time each day and stick to it.

Exercise during the day so you are tired at night.

Don't exercise less than 90 minutes before bed.

Get into a pre-sleep routine - turn the lights down, have a bath, play some soothing music, read a not-too exciting book

Train yourself to go to bed at the same time every day

If you can't sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something else.

If you wake up at the same time every night, get up and stay up all night. Do this every night until you sleep through.

Avoid using drugs and/or alcohol to get to sleep.  
Don't sleep during the day.

### **When should I ask for further help?**

Distress following trauma usually fades with time. However if you feel that you are making little progress then other help is available to aid you in overcoming your problems. Consider this in particular if your work performance or relationships are being badly affected, you feel you are no longer coping, or you have had any thoughts of harming yourself.

### **Where to go to for help?**

**Activist Trauma Support website:**

**[www.activist-trauma.net](http://www.activist-trauma.net)**

**+447962 406940**

**Out of Action website:**

**[www.outofaction.net](http://www.outofaction.net)**

**ASSIST - a charity dedicated to trauma care, offers a free professional helpline:**

Mon-Fri from 10-16h

[www.traumatic-stress.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.traumatic-stress.freeserve.co.uk)

**ASSIST Helpline: 0044 (0) 1788 560 800**

**Your Doctor**

## **2 MINUTE RELAXATION**

(yes, really, 2 minutes. Try it once and see. Remember the gist of it and say it to yourself, record it and play it back or you can get someone to read it to you too.

Close your eyes. Uncross your legs and get comfy. Say to yourself:

### **"Begin"**

I am going to count backwards from 5 -0. By the time I reach zero I will be completely relaxed in both mind and body. 1

### **"five"**

I can feel my head relax, my scalp relax, my face relax, my eyes, the skin around my eyes, my jaw, my tongue, all relax. I can feel my neck relax.

### **"four"**

i can feel my shoulders relax, my chest relax, my lungs relax. As my lungs relax I feel my breathing becoming deeper. As I breathe I become more and more relaxed. breathing relaxed, body relaxed, mind relaxed. I can feel my heart relax.

### **"three"**

I can feel my stomach relax, my back relax, my spine relax. I can feel my all my organs relax, as my breathing becomes deeper and more relaxed

### **"two"**

I can feel my buttocks relax, my (ovaries and womb/testes) relax. I

can feel my genitals relax. I can feel my thighs relax as my breathing becomes deeper and i become more and more relaxed, **"one"**

I can feel my knees relax, my shins relax, my calves relax. i can feel my ankles and feet relaxed. Toes relaxed. Whole body relaxed.

**"zero"**

I am now completely relaxed in both mind and body. Whole body relaxed. breathing relaxed. Mind completely relaxed.

**pause**

In a moment I am going to count to three. On the count of three i am going to wake up feeling calm and refreshed. This feeling of calm is going to remain with me for the rest of the day. 2

**one**

**two**

**three**

The more you do it, the more your body gets used to relaxing on command. Its cool.

1. If you want to use this to go to sleep you can say to yourself "I will sleep deeply and soundly and wake feeling rested refreshed and ready to start a new day". If you want to use it for something else, you can plant that suggestion for yourself here too.

2. Dont say this bit if you want to stay asleep!

**WHEW ON THAT NOTE IM OFF TO BED**



**RELAX!**

## **MY EXPERIENCES POST STIRLING**

After the G8 in Scotland in 2005 a close friend of mine who's been active for a long time had a major breakdown, and it was definitely linked to her experiences at the G8. Not that something as big as that can happen without there being some other issues going on. For me it was a hard thing to try and support her and fail and to have to let her go into an NHS hospital ward.

Between me and one or two other people we did what we could but it wasn't enough. One day I was on my way to the hospital to attend a ward meeting where they decide when patients can be discharged and in desperation and with not much hope of speaking to anyone I called up the number on a flyer for Activist Trauma Support from the G8 mobilisation – as it was for that event I was doubtful whether anyone would be answering calls on that number months after the event.

To my surprise it was answered by someone who put me through to another person who talked to me right then about how it was to try and deal with professionals who don't have any understanding of how we may see the world. Professionals who perceived my friend's comments which often linked everyday events to the wider global economic situation as symptoms that she was still unwell. It was very very nice to have another human acknowledge the situation and understand where I was coming from.

After this conversation I was put in touch with someone who lived in the same town as myself who had an understanding of activism (what a stupid word) and of the way our health professionals see things (she is one). We met and I was able to talk about the whole thing – my own experiences in Scotland and how they affected me (because I also had my own “stuff”, my experience was pretty

chaotic and traumatizing, but that's another story!) and about what happened to my friend afterwards.

Having one other voice which straddled the two worlds was invaluable in making sense of the whole situation, and helped me through it just by making it real to one other person, who was able to take on board my experiences without doubting or questioning them. I think it's safe to say if it hadn't been for that I might have abandoned activism altogether (that word again), at least partly though despair at what I felt to be our failure to look after each other.

# **CALLOUT FOR ISSUE TWO TO BE DISTRIBUTED AT CLIMATE CAMP 2007**

We want to hear your stories and see your cartoons! How have you dealt with the stresses of activism?

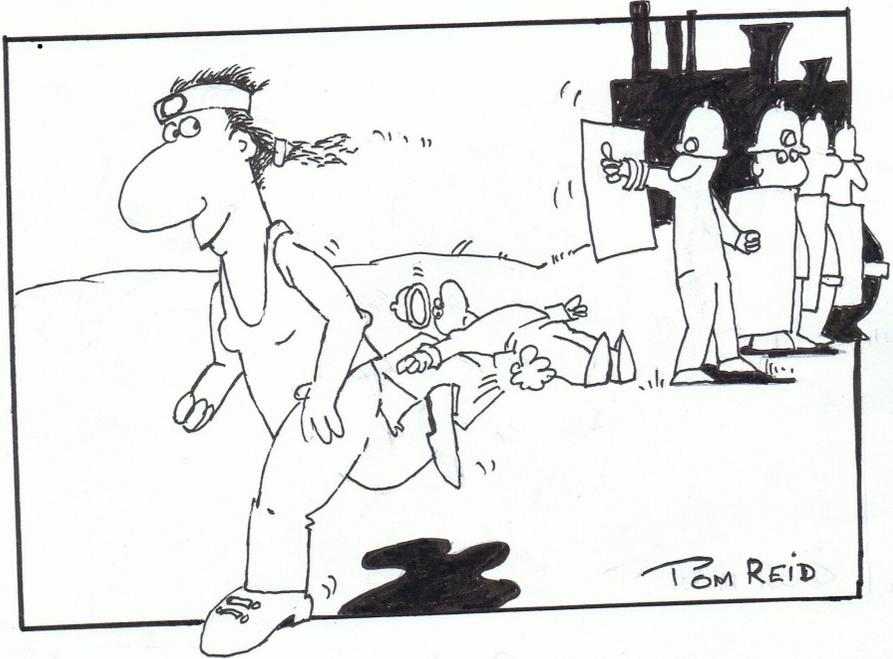
We're aiming to produce a second version of this Zine for Climate Camp 2007 in the UK and we're looking for your contributions - have you got a story to tell about healing from trauma and burnout? Something that could inspire other people?

Or have you created any artwork or poetry that encapsulates your journey to recovery? Maybe you'd rather take a political slant on how state oppression effects our mental health and emotional wellbeing, and more importantly what we can do about it? Perhaps you've got some practical tips that would be of benefit to others?

**WE WANT YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS.**

email: [activist\\_trauma@riseup.net](mailto:activist_trauma@riseup.net)

Submission Deadline: July 20th 2007



**GET PLENTY OF EXERCISE ...  
GET OUT IN THE COUNTRY ...  
GET SOME FRESH AIR ...**

[www.activist-trauma.net](http://www.activist-trauma.net)