

**Definitions**

A traumatic event is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that can affect someone emotionally and physically. These events are marked by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury, or the threat of serious injury or death. Traumatic events affect survivors, immediate responders, and the friends and families of those involved. They may also have an impact on the athletes or bystanders that witnessed the incident.

**How to Help Your Athletes**

Reassurance is the key to helping your athletes through a traumatic event. Very young athletes need both physical and verbal support. Answer questions about the event honestly, but do not dwell on frightening details or allow the subject to dominate the practice time indefinitely. Encourage athletes of all ages to express their emotions and to find a way to help others who were affected by the event. Acknowledge that you, too, may have reactions associated with the traumatic event, and take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing.

## What are some common responses to a traumatic event?

All people, especially children and adolescents, respond to trauma differently. Some common responses include:

* Feelings of fear, grief, sadness, anger, and depression
* Physical responses such as nausea, dizziness, and changes in appetite or sleep patterns
* Behavioral responses such as shock, denial, trouble concentrating, or acting younger than their age

## When should an athlete be referred to external or professional resources?

For most people, these are normal and expected responses that generally lessen with time. In some cases, these responses continue for a longer period of time and interfere with everyday life. If they are interfering with daily life or are not getting better over time, it is important to seek professional help. Some signs that an athlete may need help include:

* Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
* Crying often
* Having trouble thinking clearly
* Having frightening thoughts or flashbacks (reliving the experience)
* Feeling angry, resentful, or irritable
* Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping
* Avoiding places or people that bring back disturbing memories
* Becoming isolated from family and friends
* Becoming disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive

Children under six years old can sometimes forget how to or be unable to talk, act out the scary incident during playtime, or become unusually clingy with a parent or caregiver.



## Responsibilities

**Coach \ Meet Referee \ Meet Director**

* Submit a report of occurrence (ROO) to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Talk to the athletes, parents, and other bystanders involved. Explain the situation, offer support, and acknowledge their feelings.
* Encourage any athletes or others in the GA Swim community to seek additional support as relevant.

**Operational Risk Committee**

* Contact USA Swimming / Insurance.
* Maintain contact with all parties directly involved (e.g. coach, parents, athlete, etc.) to assist in navigating the process.

## Additional Resources for Discussing Mental Health

**Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)**

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a method of helping those who have been involved in traumatic events, designed to be used in the immediate days following such an incident. It is a process that enables peers to help their peers understand the problems that might occur after an event, and CISM also helps people prepare to continue to their daily lives. Consult the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation website to find your local CISM team:<https://icisf.org/cism-team-listings/>

**USA Swimming Mental Training & Wellness**

The USA Swimming website provides a number of articles with tips on mindfulness, confidence, and more to help athletes protect their mental health and wellness.

USA Swimming Mental Health & Wellness: <https://www.usaswimming.org/parents/popular-resources/mental-health-and-wellness>

**Michael Phelps Foundation**

The Michael Phelps Foundation (MPF) has several resources to support healthy (physical and mental) living in young athletes. MPF developed imHealthy, which provides eight emotional health lessons with handouts and exercises, as well as Raising Resilient Kids, which is a series of videos to guide coaches and parents in discussing emotional health topics with children.

MPF Foundation:<https://michaelphelpsfoundation.org/>

imHealthy:<https://classroom.kidshealth.org/classroom/index.jsp?Grade=cc&Section=ihmp>

Raising Resilient Kids:<https://www.nemours.org/well-beyond-medicine/raising-resilient-kids.html>

## Additional Trainings

It may be beneficial for teams to have designated individuals with additional training to support the Georgia Swim community in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Some helpful trainings include:

**Psychological First Aid (PFA)**

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a nationally recognized training and certification designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping.

This training can be completed online with The National Child Traumatic Stress Network:<https://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=596>

**Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)**

Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) trains people how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.

This training can be completed online with the QPR Institute:<https://qprinstitute.com/>