



Most people feel unwell if they:

- Are separated from their loved ones;
- Have experienced shocking events (e.g. loss, inhumane behaviour, life-threatening situations);
- Experience uncertainty about the future;
- Find themselves in poor living conditions;
- Are adapting to a new cultural environment;
- Have difficulties finding employment, to provide for themselves and their families;
- Know that their community back home is not safe.

Most people feel unwell if they:

- Do not feel themselves;
- Feel a loss of appetite;
- Experience insomnia and nightmares;
- Find it hard to concentrate, to work or study;
- Have pains in their body (e.g. headache, backache, nausea, racing heart) for no apparent physical reason;
- Feel frustration and anger;
- Have a lack of energy or feel internal fatigue;
- Have excessive negative thoughts;
- Experience anxiety, guilt, and loneliness;
- Mourn everything they have lost.

These are normal human reactions to difficult situations.

It is important to know that as your circumstances change, you will feel and think about the future differently.

How can you help yourself feel better now?

- Find someone you trust to talk to about your situation. If you do not tell anyone how you are feeling, it can all boil inside.

Consulting a psychologist can also be a good idea. Even one consultation can help reduce anxiety, improve sleep and help you to relax. Psychologists are trained to listen and to help you understand what's going on.

Social workers and other professionals can also listen and help solve some of your practical problems.

- Walking, playing sports and exercising always improves your inner well-being too.
- Participate in activities that could help take your mind off heavy thoughts. Maybe it is cooking, meeting up with friends, visiting some undiscovered streets or learning languages.

Some people may have suicidal thoughts at difficult moments in their lives. What to do if that's you?

- Make sure you tell someone about it, there are always people around who care and can help. Speak to those you trust.
- Don't be alone with your thoughts. If you can't share them, at least try to spend time with others.

When a situation seems to be without a solution, it may be that you just cannot see it at that moment. Suffering and despair blind us, it's just important to survive. The next day, or the day after that, you will feel differently. The will to live and overcome difficulties will return.

Survivor's guilt

People who have experienced very painful, traumatic events – or who have left their country for safety – often feel bad leaving others behind, to live in difficult conditions, or to know that they have not survived. This is called survivor's guilt (also survivor syndrome) and is a very common experience among refugees.

This guilt can get in the way of building a new life. There is a danger of getting stuck in the past with negative thoughts. It can be difficult to allow yourself to enjoy life and dream about the future. You may start to feel that you have not done enough. You may feel irritable, angry or helpless.

Survivor's guilt can be triggered by watching the news from home, or from the realisation that you may not be able to return.

Important:

- Remind yourself that you have the right to experience joy and to create your own life, to reinvent yourself again.
- Don't expect the impossible from yourself – sometimes we all break down. Survivor's guilt is a normal reaction in these circumstances. Eventually, this feeling will subside.
- Don't isolate yourself from others. Talking to people with similar experiences is as important as talking to those who have never lived through something like that.
- Find a way to express your difficult feelings. You can do this by writing them down on paper or expressing yourself through art. Many people also find relief through talking to a psychologist.

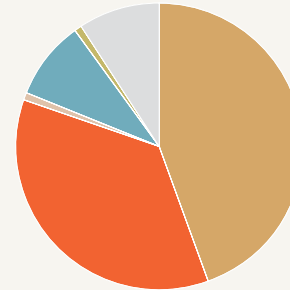
Survivor's guilt can also be a source of energy:

- Have you been given the chance to feel comfortable, sleep well and get rest? You can take this as an opportunity to "do something with your life". Perhaps by pursuing an education, or doing meaningful work, unleashing your abilities, and building relationships. If you allow yourself some joy – it will be easier to do everything.
- Even small acts of kindness or meaningful activities for others can make a survivor's guilt subside. For example, explaining the situation in your country to those who might not know it, volunteering or supporting others in any way.

Feeling guilty does not mean you are guilty.

It's common to feel guilty when you do something wrong, such as hurting another person, disappointing them, or insulting them. Then you have a responsibility to apologise and find ways to make amends.

Maybe your experience was not entirely your responsibility. The following exercise will help you understand this:



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Write down everything that made your country unsafe and caused you to leave. Who is responsible? What are the contributing circumstances? The list should be as long as possible.

Distribute all items on the list over a 100 percent scale. You will then see that your share of responsibility is very small. You had your reasons for leaving in search of safety.

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