

Reactions to Traumatic Situations



A traumatic event or critical incident causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally. Even though the event may be over, you may be experiencing, or may experience later, strong emotional and physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to feel emotional aftershocks when they experience a tragic event. The aftershocks may appear immediately, hours or days later, or in some cases, it may take weeks or months until stress reactions appear.

Possible Symptoms After a Traumatic Event

- Increased anxiety or fear
- Inability to sleep, eat, relax, or concentrate
- Irritability, short temper, feelings of rage
- Paranoid thoughts or nightmares
- Hypersensitivity, jumpiness
- Feeling detached or estranged from others, or clinging

If you have experienced a traumatic event:

- Realize what you are experiencing is normal
- Talk with coworkers, supervisors, friends, and family
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope with your reactions

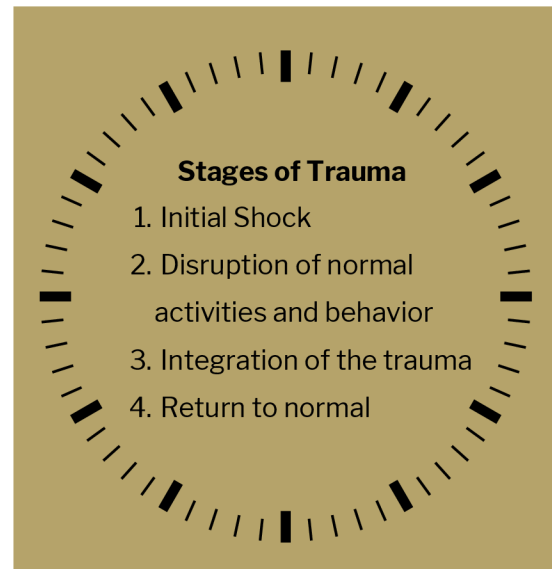
If you are helping someone through a traumatic event:

- Offer support and take advantage of resources that are offered
- Encourage others to reach out for assistance
- Be readily available for anyone who was involved in the traumatic situation, regardless if they do or do not want your assistance

How family and friends can help:

- Spend time with the individual involved in the traumatic situation.
- Offer your assistance and provide a listening ear, even if the individual has not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe now.
- Help with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, and watching children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.

Do not tell them that they are “lucky it wasn’t worse.” Someone that has been through a traumatic experience is not consoled by these types of statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry that such an event has occurred, and that you want to understand and assist them.



This content is provided as a support resource and is not intended to replace recommendations from a physician or licensed mental health professional. Dial 911 for life threatening events.

More About Reactions to Traumatic Situations

Your reactions are normal.

- Don't label your feelings crazy, they are normal.
- Reach out to people you trust and talk to them - they care about you.
- Spend time with others.
- Be aware of numbing your pain with drugs or alcohol.
- Get plenty of rest, and eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if you don't feel like it.
- Within the first 24-48 hours, do physical exercise alternated with relaxation.
- Maintain as normal of a schedule as possible.
- Help your co-workers by checking in on them.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with those you trust.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that make you happy.
- Don't make any big life decisions or changes.
- Make small, daily decisions that will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal and will decrease over time.
- Structure your time; keep busy and productive.

| Emotional | Physical | Cognitive | Behavioral |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Agitation | Chest pain | Blaming others | Alcohol or substance use |
| Anxiety | Chills | Confusion | Antisocial acts |
| Apprehension | Difficulty breathing | Unaware of surroundings | Appetite change |
| Depression | Difficulty seeing | Disorientation of time | Changes in social life |
| Emotional outbursts | Dizziness | Hypervigilance | Changes in speech |
| Emotional shock | Elevated blood pressure | Intrusive images | Erratic movements |
| Fear | Fainting | Poor abstract thinking | Increased startle reflex |
| Feeling overwhelmed | Fatigue | Poor concentration | Inability to rest |
| Frustration | Headaches | Poor decision making | Intense pacing |
| Grief | Insomnia/nightmares | Poor problem solving | Withdrawing |
| Guilt | Muscle tremors | Suspicious of others | |
| Intense anger | Nausea/vomiting | Uncertainty | |
| Irritability | Profuse sweating | | |
| Inappropriate response | Rapid heart rate | | |
| Panic denial | Teeth grinding | | |
| | Thirst | | |
| | Twitches | | |
| | Weakness | | |



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DEAEAP.com

800.275.7460

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