

Crisis Reaction

A normal response to an abnormal situation

All of these feelings and reactions are normal and natural, even though they may seem unusual and very different from others.

We are all individuals. We all respond in our own way, differently.

The memory will always be a part of your life. The incident cannot be erased.

Possible Reactions

Numbness	Confusion
Crying	Difficulty concentrating
Fatigue	Memory problems
Sleep disturbances	Religious confusion
Loss of trust	Change in appetite/weight
Flashbacks	Low resistance to illness
Frustration	Anniversary difficulties
Helplessness	Regression
Depression	Alcohol/drug abuse
Despair	Excessive use of sick leave
Grief	Work/family problems
Guilt	Withdrawal
Anger	Suicidal thoughts
Outrage	Insecurity
Fear	Anxiety
Irritability	Feeling overwhelmed
Feeling inadequate	Difficulty returning to normal activity

Suggestions

Rest

Contact friends

Talk about what happened

Talk about your feelings

Don't Monday Morning Quarterback

Take care of yourself physically

Rest, exercise, balanced diet, maintain a routine

Re-occurring dreams and flashbacks are normal- don't fight them! Avoid use of drugs and alcohol

Find a good counselor if the feelings become prolonged or too intense

Common Signs and Symptoms of Distress

Physical

Nausea
Tremors
Sleep disturbances
Feeling uncoordinated
Profuse sweating
Chills
Diarrhea
Chest pains
Rapid heart rate
Increased blood pressure
Headaches
Muscle aches

Cognitive

Slow thinking
Difficulty making decisions
Flashbacks
Distressing dreams
Confusion
Disorientation
Difficulty with calculations
Difficulty concentrating
Memory problems
Difficulty naming objects
Poor attention span

Behavioral

Change in activity
Withdrawal
Suspiciousness
Change in communication
Change in interactions with others
Increased or decreased food intake
Increased smoking
Increased alcohol intake
Overly vigilant to the environment
Excessive humor
Excessive silence
Unusual behavior

Emotional

Anxiety and fear
Guilt and grief
Irritability, sadness, and depression
Feeling lost, abandoned
Feeling isolated
Worry about others
Wanting to limit contact with others
Wanting to die
Anger
Numbness
Startled and shocked

All of these feelings and reactions are normal and natural, even though they may seem unusual and different.

We each respond to stress differently, in our own individual ways.

An important point to note is that these distress signals are a change from what the person is accustomed to experiencing.

Helpful Hints for Recovery

Trying some of the following hints may help to alleviate the emotional pain associated with the traumatic event.

For Yourself

- try to rest
- contact friends
- have someone stay with you for at least a few hours, or for periods during the next day or so
- reoccurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them - they will decrease over time and become less painful
- eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it)
- try to keep a reasonable level of activity
- fight against boredom
- physical activity is often helpful
- reestablish a normal schedule as soon as possible
- express your feelings as they arise
- talk to people who love you
- find a good counselor if the feelings become prolonged or too intense

For Family Members and Friends:

- listen carefully
- spend time with the traumatized person
- offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help
- reassure them that they are safe
- help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children
- give them some private time
- don't take their anger or other feelings personally
- don't tell them they are "lucky it wasn't worse" - traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead tell them you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them

If the symptoms described above are severe or if they last longer than six weeks, the traumatized person may need professional counseling. The person or family members may contact a private practice psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker to talk about the feelings of problems associated with the event.

**The information on this sheet was prepared by Jeffery T. Mitchell, Ph.D., of the University of Maryland's Emergency Health Services Program.

About Stress

You know what stress is; You know where it comes from; but do you know what it is doing to you?

When you experience stress your body undergoes changes known as the fight-or-flight response:

- pupils become much larger
- hearing becomes clearer
- muscles get tense
- blood goes to your head
- heart and breathing rate increase
- hands and feet get cold and sweaty

Chronic stress can cause wear and tear on the body, and has been related to other ailments such as:

- headaches
- peptic ulcers
- arthritis
- colitis
- asthma
- diarrhea
- sexual problems
- muscle tension

Other Danger Signs to Look For:

- becoming isolated, avoiding friends and family
- losing interest in things you like to do
- inability to concentrate and make decisions
- having more fights with children and spouse
- changes in eating habits
- drinking more
- sleep problems
- putting things off
- becoming sick more often
- fatigue

DON'T FEEL HELPLESS!

Sometimes when a person has been under stress for a long time, their minds become as tired as their bodies, and they stop trying to think of new ways to deal with problems. They get stuck in a rut thinking about all of the problems that they can't fix, so that they sometimes forget to think about the only ones they can fix.

Don't forget that you can do something to deal with the effects of stress in your life.

Psychologists advise remembering and doing more of those activities which have helped you relax and feel healthier in the past, such as:

- exercise
- hot baths
- progressive muscle relaxation
- private time
- reduce smoking
- stay away from alcohol, caffeine, salt, fats, sugar
- see old friends
- proper diet
- playing sports
- church
- deep breathing
- family outings
- visual imagery
- plenty of rest

General Coping Strategies

1. Acknowledge your emotions as *normal reactions* to an abnormal situation.
2. Talk it out: Talking about your emotions helps let them go.
 - a. talking reduces intensity
 - b. helps you define the way you feel
 - c. clarifies things in your own mind
 - d. helps you feel more in control
3. "Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?"
It happened because of your role. Not because of *who* you are.
4. Keep it in perspective.
5. Coping with anger:
 - a. Acknowledge that you are angry
 - b. Probe your anger.
 1. anger at whom?
 2. anger at what?
 3. why?
 4. understand your anger from all points of view.
 - c. What is *underneath* your anger? Fear? Vulnerability? Frustration?
 - d. What are you doing with your anger, or is it controlling you?
 - e. What will you do with your anger?
6. Responsibility guilt:
Taking responsibility for what happened may be a way of feeling in control.
Realize you cannot always control what is happening around you, but you can control your response to the situation. Don't take responsibility for events beyond your control.
7. Give yourself appropriate time to work a critical incident through. (normally six to ten weeks)
8. Get out of second-guessing yourself
Understand your perceptions before and during the incident that led to your actions (frame of mind #1)
Don't judge yourself from the frame of mind you have after the incident is over (frame of mind #2) when you finally know all of the previously unknown facts and consequences