

# 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

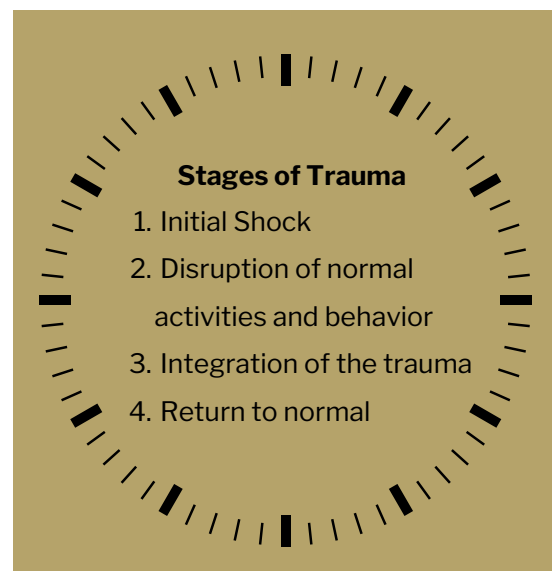
## If you are helping someone through a traumatic event:

- 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.

### Physical

Chest pain  
Chills  
Difficulty breathing  
Difficulty seeing  
Dizziness  
Elevated blood pressure  
Fainting  
Fatigue  
Headaches  
Insomnia/nightmares  
Muscle tremors  
Nausea/vomiting  
Profuse sweating  
Rapid heart rate  
Teeth grinding  
Thirst  
Twitches  
Weakness

### Emotional

Agitation  
Anxiety  
Apprehension  
Depression  
Emotional outbursts  
Emotional shock  
Fear  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Frustration  
Grief  
Guilt  
Intense anger  
Irritability  
Inappropriate response  
Panic denial

### Cognitive

Blaming others  
Confusion  
Unaware of surroundings  
Disorientation of time  
Hypervigilance  
Intrusive images  
Poor abstract thinking  
Poor concentration  
Poor decision making  
Poor problem solving  
Suspicious of others  
Uncertainty

### Behavioral

Alcohol or substance use  
Antisocial acts  
Appetite change  
Changes in social life  
Changes in speech  
Erratic movements  
Increased startle reflex  
Inability to rest  
Intense pacing  
Withdrawing



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