

## Reactions that can occur after a traumatic event

If you are reading this, you may have been involved in a traumatic event. This event may have resulted in the loss of, or injury to a loved one. You may have received an injury; have been exposed to a serious threat; witnessed a terrible event; have experienced property loss; or have been part of a difficult event in other ways.

As a result of this exposure you may experience some emotional and physical reactions, including feeling overwhelmed. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience these emotional aftershocks when they have been involved in a difficult event.

How long these stress reactions last, will depend on numerous factors including the severity of the traumatic event; how closely involved you were to this event; how long you were exposed to the trauma; and how you have been effected by past traumas in your life.

These stress reactions usually pass - even more quickly when you talk about the event with someone who is important to you in your life. Sometimes talking to a professional about this event and your reactions to this event can also be of assistance.

### physical •

- fatigue
- thirst
- nausea
- headaches
- muscle aches
- weakness
- visual difficulties
- dizziness
- diarrhea
- chills
- feeling uncoordinated
- rapid heart rate
- vomiting
- rapid or difficulty in breathing
- increased blood pressure
- tremors (lips or hands)

*\* Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.*

## thinking

- confusion
- slowed thinking
- nightmares
- poor attention span
- hyper vigilance
- uncertainty
- poor concentration
- disorientation
- difficulty in thinking and in making decisions
- heighten or lowered alertness
- the event is replayed over and over in your head

## emotional

- numbness
- disbelief
- denial
- fear
- guilt
- anger
- sadness
- anxiety
- panic
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling isolated
- irritability
- feeling lost or abandoned

## behavioral

- sleep disturbances
- withdrawal
- inability to rest
- intensified pacing
- uncontrolled emotional outbursts
- erratic movements
- changes in speech pattern
- change in social activity
- increased alcohol consumption and/or drug use
- loss or increase in appetite

## Helpful hints for you after a traumatic event

The reactions you are having are common, and in fact quite normal. With understanding and support they will pass. Activities that will help with your recovery include:

- Talking with people who are good listeners
- Expressing feelings as they arise
- Eating well balanced, nutritious, regular meals - even if you don't feel like eating.
- Getting plenty of rest
- Connecting with people who care about you
- Having someone stay with you if you are feeling scared
- Maintaining as normal a schedule as possible, without overdoing it
- Having a reasonable level of physical activity, without overdoing it
- Giving yourself permission to feel rotten
- Not thinking you are going crazy
- Keeping a journal to express feelings as they arise
- Not making big life changes
- Being aware that alcohol and drugs can complicate and delay your recovery
- Talking with a professional if these feelings become too intense or too prolonged

## Suggestions for helping another person after a traumatic event

Some of the following suggestions may help you to help others after a traumatic event has occurred.

- Listen carefully
- Spend time with the traumatized person
- Offer practical assistance
- Reassure them they are safe
- Help with everyday tasks such as cooking, minding children, etc.
- Respect their need for private time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally
- Don't tell them they are "lucky," or "it could be worse." Traumatized people are not consoled by these statements. Instead tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and let them know that you would like to help