

WAYS FOR YOU TO RESPOND TO THE STRESS REACTION

- **WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS ESPECIALLY**, periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time: keep busy and normalize your schedule as much as possible.
- You're having very typical reactions for someone who has been through a critical incident - don't label yourself "crazy"!
- Talk to people – talk is one of the most healing medicines.
- Beware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs, alcohol, and caffeine. You don't need to complicate the situation with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out. People do care.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking on them to see how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel bad and share feelings with others.
- Keep a journal. Write your way through those difficult times or sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize that those around you are under stress, too!
- Don't make any major life changes.

- Make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a sense of control during this tough time. For example, if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them even if you are not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are common at first – don't try to fight them. They'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

WAYS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO RESPOND TO YOUR STRESS REACTION

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person. Offer your assistance and listening ear 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 that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" – such statements do not console traumatized people. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such as event has occurred and you want to understand and support them.

What You Need to Know About Stress



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You have experienced a traumatic event or a high stress event (any incident that causes persons to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function).

Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite typical, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes, they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and signals of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the event.

With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that this particular event was too tough for the person to manage on their own.

COMMON SIGNS AND SIGNALS OF A STRESS REACTION

Physical *

Chills, thirst, fatigue, nausea, fainting, twitches, vomiting, dizziness, weakness, chest pain, headaches, elevated blood pressure, rapid heart rate, muscle tremors, shock symptoms, grinding of teeth, visual difficulties, profuse sweating, difficulty breathing, etc.

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

Cognitive

Confusion; nightmares; uncertainty; hyper-vigilance; suspiciousness; intrusive images; blaming someone; poor problem-solving; poor abstract thinking; poor attention / decisions; poor concentration / memory; disorientation of time, place, or person; difficulty identifying objects or people; heightened or lowered alertness; increased or decreased awareness of surroundings, etc.

Emotional

Fear, guilt, grief, panic, denial, anxiety, agitation, irritability, depression, intense anger, apprehension, emotional shock, emotional outbursts, feeling overwhelmed, loss of emotional control, inappropriate emotional response, etc.

Behavioral

Withdrawal, antisocial acts, inability to rest, intensified pacing, erratic movements, change in social activity, change in speech patterns, loss or increase in appetite, hyper-alert to environment, increased alcohol or substance consumption, change in usual communications, etc.

Spiritual

Anger at God, questioning of basic beliefs, withdrawal from place of worship, uncharacteristic religious involvement, faith practices and rituals seem empty / meaningless, loss of meaning and purpose, sense of isolation from God, anger at clergy or other spiritual leaders, etc.