



REACTIONS TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Following a traumatic event can cause personal reactions and feelings that a person is not used to, regardless of the degree of trauma. Usually these reactions will occur immediately following the trauma. Sometimes however, a person will seem to be doing fine at the time of the trauma and then have a delayed response weeks or months later. There is a wide range of “normal” reactions to a trauma, and the lists below are not all inclusive.

IMMEDIATE FEELINGS AND REACTIONS:

Alone:

- particularly if you have no immediate support base

Anger:

- directed at the attackers
- at others for their reactions
- at rescue personnel
- at the system that allows such things to happen
- at why no one did anything to help or stop the incident

Appetite:

- loss of appetite
- don't have the energy to eat

Confusion:

- feelings difficult to identify
- thoughts unclear

Fear:

- for yourself, your safety
- concern for your family, for others
- will the accused come after me

Frustration:

- unable to change events
- that you had to answer too many questions
- because you can't remember all the details

Guilt:

- did I do something wrong?
- did I cause the event – could it have been prevented?
- that I survived it
- that I did not get hurt

Helplessness:

- not in control of the situation
- why me?
- what singled me out for this event?
- am I different than others?

Relief:

- that the crisis is over
- that I survived it
- that I did not get hurt

FEELINGS AND REACTIONS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS:

In addition to the above feelings and reaction in the first 24 to 72 hours you may now also experience:

- loss of self worth
- you feel anxious
- unsure, uncertain about how you should be feeling and acting
- you become more deliberate about normal everyday things you do
- you may not be as sociable or friendly
- you may experience short term memory loss
- why me?
- what did I do to deserve this?
- am I different?
- I've already had my share of suffering

Flashbacks:

- can be triggered by seeing a person who looks like the accused
- can be triggered by a sight, sound or smell

Stress/Fatigue:

- feeling tight, wound up
- keeping everything inside
- unable to let go or relax

Vulnerability:

- apprehension, it happened once, can it happen again?
- feeling unsafe
- your guard is up
- you startle easily, due to sudden movements or loud noises
- you may dream about the incident every night or several times each night

The degree of stress experienced can be dependent upon the potential for reoccurrence.

COPING:

- Alcohol and Drugs
refrain from excessive use; drugs and alcohol can make your feelings worse
- Rest and exercise
try to maintain your normal patterns for rest and exercise
- Diet
it is important to eat healthy

All of the above are important, but perhaps the most effective coping skill is to talk about what happened, how you felt and how you feel now. Talk to your colleagues, family – including children, friends – those you feel close to and who understand you.

If you can, let your feelings out, talk them out, your stress reactions should begin to diminish with a few days to a few weeks.

REACTIONS AND FEELINGS IN FOUR TO SIX WEEKS:

During this time, most people's feelings and reaction will begin to diminish. For some, there may be short relapses due to memory associations, but generally, most people are beginning to cope.

It is not unusual for people to experience:

- Dreams
- Sleeplessness
- Depression
- Irritability
- Social withdrawal
- Resentment
- Bitterness

If they are not diminishing or if they interfere with your lifestyle to a great degree, perhaps you should seek professional advice.

Trauma is the inability to cope with your personal reactions after a reasonable amount of time.

WHO CAN HELP?

If after the first few days, you find yourself completely overwhelmed and cannot cope with your feelings, to the extent that your reactions are markedly interfering with your:

- Work
- Family
- School
- Lifestyle

You can also talk to members of Victim Services Unit who are trained in the reactions and feelings following a crisis. They will be able to refer you to community professionals and resources.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. You are not alone.