



# Common Reactions To a Traumatic Event

Please note that following a traumatic event, people commonly experience a number of reactions that may seem negative and not feel normal. The following lists reflect normal reactions to an abnormal situation that may follow a traumatic event. These reactions may also be caused by cumulative effect of traumatic events.

## **Physical Effects**

- Fatigue, exhaustion
- Increased physical pain
- Sleep disturbances
- Reduced immune response
- Decreased appetite
- Decreased libido
- Hyper-arousal
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Increased startle response
- Muscle tremors
- Profuse sweating
- Digestive problems
- More accident prone
- Ritualistic behavior

## **Interpersonal Effects**

- “Us against Them” mentality
- Reduced relational intimacy
- Impaired work performance
- Impaired school performance
- Compartmentalize to survive
- Social withdrawal
- Work place alienation
- Decreased satisfaction
- Distrust
- Cynicism
- Externalization of blame
- Externalization of vulnerability
- Over protectiveness

## **Spiritual Effects**

- Spiritual disconnection with their Faith
- Questioning their faith or theological beliefs
- Anger at a greater power or spiritual leader
- Spiritual emptiness
- Withdrawal from the faith community
- Increased awareness of morality
- Guilt for feelings, i.e. anger, desire for vengeance

## **Emotional Effects**

- Shock
- Fear/terror
- Irritability
- Anger
- Grief or sadness
- Depression with PTSD
- Despair
- Loss of pleasure from familiar activities
- Nervousness
- Blame
- Guilt
- Emotional Numbing
- Helplessness/Hopelessness
- Declined empathy/compassion
- Difficulty feeling happy

## **Cognitive Effects**

- Impaired concentration
- Impaired decision-making ability
- Memory impairment
- PTSD
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Distortion
- Increased Risk of suicide
- Self-blame
- Decreased self-esteem
- Decreased self-efficacy
- Worry
- Dissociation (e.g., tunnel vision, dreamlike or “spacey” feeling)





# Critical Incident Stress Management Tips



- + Within The First 24-48 hours period of appropriate exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- + Structure your time; keep busy.
- + You're normal and having normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy.
- + Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- + Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with substance abuse problem. Avoid alcohol.
- + Avoid excessive news and excessive eating.
- + Reach out; people do care.
- + Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- + Spend time with others.
- + Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- + Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feeling with others.
- + Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- + Do things that feel good to you.
- + Realize those around you are under stress.
- + Don't make any big life changes.
- + Don't do any extreme sports.
- + Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them even if you're not sure.
- + Get plenty of rest.
- + Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks – they are typical and will decrease over time and will become less painful.
- + Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

## ~ For Family Members & Friends ~

- + Listen carefully.
- + Spend time with the traumatized person.
- + Offer your assistance and a 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;" a traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.