

Reactions to Crisis, Trauma, Loss and Accumulation of Stressful Events

A crisis is always real to the individual experiencing it?

After a crisis or traumatic experience (an event that causes complex reactions and has the potential to overwhelm one's normal coping mechanism), it is normal for people to experience emotional aftershocks or stress reactions. These reactions can occur immediately or they can take hours, days, weeks, or even months after the experience. They can last for days, weeks, or even longer, depending on the impact and severity of the crisis or trauma. It is important to understand that trauma affects people in many different ways and these reactions are part of the stress response, not a sign of weakness, inability to cope with the situation or inability to do a job.

Acquiring accurate information about typical reactions, along with empathy and support from friends, co-workers, family, or other loved ones, can make a big difference to people affected by traumatic events. However, sometimes professional assistance may be needed. Seeking professional help does not mean a person is weak or crazy; it simply means that the event or combination of events was too powerful or overwhelming for the person to manage alone.

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Relational	Behavioral	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flight, Fight or Freeze ▪ Shock, numbness ▪ Nausea ▪ Exhaustion ▪ Muscle tremors, shakes or aches ▪ Twitches ▪ Chest pain ▪ Fast pulse ▪ Rapid heart rate ▪ Headaches ▪ Weakness, fatigue ▪ Dizziness ▪ Sweating ▪ Elevated blood pressure ▪ Chills ▪ Trouble sleeping ▪ Excessive sleeping ▪ Diarrhea ▪ Indigestion ▪ Non-specific body complaints ▪ Thirst ▪ Grinding Teeth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blaming ▪ Confusion ▪ Poor attention ▪ Poor decisions ▪ Hard to concentrate ▪ Memory problems ▪ Hyper-vigilant ▪ Nightmares ▪ Intrusive images ▪ Poor problem solving ▪ Difficulty calculating ▪ Difficulty identifying objects or people ▪ Difficulty remembering details ▪ Time distortion ▪ Auditory distortion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anxiety ▪ Crying ▪ Guilt ▪ Survivor guilt ▪ Numbing ▪ Grief ▪ Disbelief ▪ Denial ▪ Panic ▪ Startle response ▪ Emotional shock ▪ Uncertainty ▪ Depression like symptoms ▪ Apprehension ▪ Irritability ▪ Agitation ▪ Anger ▪ Outbursts ▪ Loss of emotional control ▪ Euphoria ▪ Obsessiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Withdrawal from family, coworkers, colleagues ▪ Withdrawal from organizations or other affiliations ▪ Isolation ▪ Stigma, racism, sexism, media response ▪ Secondary injuries from friends, family, social & professional affiliations contribute to additional stress ▪ Unemployment or under-employment ▪ Discontinued educational pursuits ▪ Lack of community or political involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loss of motivation ▪ Change in speech ▪ Withdrawal ▪ Emotional outbursts ▪ Accident prone ▪ Potential for violence ▪ Suspiciousness ▪ Loss/increase of appetite ▪ Startle reaction ▪ Alcohol/drug consumption ▪ Inability to rest ▪ Pacing ▪ Change in sexual function or sex drive ▪ Crying ▪ Recklessness ▪ Hyper-alert to environment ▪ Ritualistic behavior ▪ Criminal behavior ▪ Excessive spending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redefining moral values ▪ Questions about faith ▪ Run to or from God ▪ Anger at God ▪ Vulnerability and mortality ▪ Withdraw from faith and religion ▪ Concern about hereafter ▪ Questions about good and evil ▪ Questioning God ▪ Promising, bargaining & challenging God during times of duress or trauma ▪ Searching for meaning and hope ▪ Concern about vengeance, justice and forgiveness ▪ Spiritual "awakening"

- ☞ Traumatic experiences are those that can be overwhelming, causing intense negative emotions, and involving a loss of control and vulnerability.
- ☞ The experience of trauma may be experienced differently for everyone based on previous life experiences and resilience. What is traumatic for one person may not be for another
- ☞ It's not what's wrong with you? It's what happened to you and what you did to survive!
- ☞ Responding to trauma/crisis is an appropriate way for the body and mind to handle what it has just experienced, seen, smelled, touched or heard. It is the physiological way we protect ourselves.
- ☞ You're normal and having normal reactions to an abnormal event. Don't label yourself crazy.

Always seek medical help or additional assistance if there is even a question that it is needed!

~ This is a compilation of information inspired by the ICISF with contributions and input from a host of people dedicated to helping others.

Email teia@1stresponderemdr.com

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Things to try after crisis, trauma, loss or accumulation of stressful events:

- ☞ **Take care of yourself, especially in the first 24- 48 hours.** Try to eat healthy, avoid using alcohol and drugs, and get some exercise—even a walk around the block and deep breathing can make a difference to relieve stress. Hydrate, stress is hard on the body. Do things that feel good to you....as long as they are safe for you. **Give yourself permission to feel rotten**
- ☞ **Reach out to friends and family.** Talk to someone you trust about how you are doing. If you have children, talk to them. They may feel scared, angry, sad, worried, and confused. Let them know it's okay to talk about what's on their mind. Role model healthy coping. **Realize that those around you may be under stress too, people can be moody and snippy with each other.** Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings & checking on how they are doing. You may say something they are already thinking.
- ☞ **Limit your consumption of news.** We live in a society where the news is available to us 24 hours a day via television, radio, and the Internet. The constant replay of news stories about a disaster or traumatic event can increase stress and anxiety and make some people relive the event over and over. Reduce the amount of news you watch and/or listen to.
- ☞ **Get enough “good” sleep and rest.** Some people have difficulty falling asleep after a disaster or wake up throughout the night. If you have trouble sleeping, only go to bed when you are ready to sleep, avoid using cell phones or laptops in bed, and avoid *drinking caffeine or alcohol* at least one hour before going to bed. If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing what's on your mind in a journal or on a sheet of paper. **Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless nights.**
- ☞ **Establish and maintain a routine.** Try to eat meals at regular times and put yourself on a sleep schedule to ensure an adequate amount of rest. Include a positive or fun activity in your schedule that you can look forward to each day or week.
- ☞ **Avoid making major life decisions.** Doing things like switching jobs or careers can already be stressful and are even harder to adjust to directly after a disaster. **Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, if someone ask you want you want to eat. Answer them.**
- ☞ **Understand there will be changes.** Disasters can destroy homes, schools, and places of business and worship and can disrupt the lives of people living in affected areas for a long time. Sometimes, people lose loved ones or experience injuries, both physical and mental, that may last a lifetime. Some people may also experience a temporary or permanent loss of employment. For children, attending a new or temporary school may result in being separated from peers, or after-school activities may be disrupted.
- ☞ **Don't try to fight** recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks- they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.

For Family and Friends:

- ☞ Listen carefully, spend time with the traumatized person, reassure them that they are safe and give them some private time. Don't take their irritability, anger or other feelings personally.
- ☞ Offer your assistance even if they have not asked for help and assist them with daily tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for family, minding children.
- ☞ Don't tell them that they are “lucky it wasn't worse”, those statements do not console a traumatized person. Instead, tell them you're sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.

Always seek medical help or additional assistance if there is even a question that it is needed!