

## Common stress and emotional reactions after the disaster

There are a number of common reactions people have when they are exposed to a traumatic event. **We know that these are normal** and we know it helps to talk or write about them.

- Initial euphoria, relief
  - Guilt about surviving or not having suffered as much as others
  - Anxiety, fear, insecurity, worry
  - Pervasive concern about well-being of loved ones
  - Feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, being overwhelmed
  - Vulnerability or shame, anger over vulnerability
  - Loss of sense of power, control, well-being, self-confidence, trust
  - Irritability, restlessness, hyper-excitability, impatience, agitation, anger, blaming (anger at source, anger at those exempted, anger at those trying to help, anger “for no apparent reason”)
  - Outrage, resentment
  - Frustration
  - Cynicism, negativity
  - Mood swings
  - Despair, grief, sadness
  - Periods of crying, emotional “attacks” or “pangs”
  - Feelings of emptiness, loss, hopelessness, depression
  - Reawakening of past trauma, painful experiences
  - Apathy, diminished interest in usual activities
  - Feelings of isolation, detachment, estrangement, “no one else can understand”
  - Denial or constriction of feelings; numbness
  - “Flashbacks,” intrusive memories of the event, illusions, pseudo-hallucinations
  - Recurrent dreams of the event or other traumas
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- Poor concentration
  - Mental confusion, slowness of thinking
  - Forgetfulness
  - Amnesia (complete or partial)
  - Inability to make judgments and decisions
  - Preoccupation with the event
  - Repetitive, obsessive thoughts and ruminations
  - Over-generalization, over-association with the event
  - Loss of objectivity
  - Confusion regarding religious beliefs/value systems; breakdown of meaning and faith
  - Self-criticism over things done/not done during trauma
  - Awareness of own and loved ones’ mortality

Adapted from: <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac/CommonStressReactions.asp> 2004.