

Common Stress and Emotional Reactions after a traumatic event

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.