



Stress Response

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A woman with dark hair is looking down at a smartphone. The image has a strong green tint overlay. She is resting her chin on her hand. The background is dark and out of focus.

What to Expect After an Incident

- People who witness or survive stressful events may have periods when they alternate between anxiety and re-experiencing the incident and times when they are depressed and withdraw from family, friends, co-workers, and usual or important activities. *At some level these changes are normal and to be expected.*
- Situations that strongly remind you of the incident may spark stress reactions. These could include being in the area where the incident occurred, reading newspaper articles, watching the news, or being asked to retell the story.
- It is not uncommon for hearings or similar meetings related to the incident to bring on or increase stress responses.
- Anniversaries of the event may bring memories back and trigger stress responses.
- Families, friends and co-workers may also experience similar symptoms.
- People should not always assume they will “get over it” or that “life will return to normal.” Rather, a successful recovery from an incident means getting past the incident and moving on with the changes it may bring.



Suggestions After an Incident

DO

- Make sure you get ample rest.
- Maintain good eating and exercise habits.
- Take the time for leisure activities.
- Spend time with your friends and family.
- Talk to your close friends and family about what happened and how you feel about it.
- Anticipate that the incident may bother you for some time afterward.

DON'T

- Drink alcohol excessively.
- Use legal or illegal drugs to “numb yourself”.
- Withdraw from your family and friends.
- Stay away from work.
- Reduce your leisure activities.
- Look for easy answers.
- Keep your reactions “bottled up”.



Stress Reactions to Events

Over the next month you may experience normal reactions to the kind of experience you've had which may include:

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Exhaustion
- Health problems (such as a change in appetite, headaches, digestive problems)

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty with concentration
- Inability to attach importance to anything other than the incident
- "Flashbacks" (re-experiencing some aspect of the incident)
- Limited activity
- Startle reactions
- Memory disturbance
- Isolating

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS

- Fears, disturbing thoughts or fantasies
- Guilt
- Anger – which may be manifested by irritability, frustration, wanting to blame someone
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feelings of helplessness
- Amnesia regarding the event

These are normal reactions and are a part of the healing process. Other people cannot make your uncomfortable feelings disappear, but there are things you can do to feel more whole.



Things to Try

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS, periods of physical exercise alternating with relaxation may help alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time — keep busy.
- Remember, you're normal and having normal reactions — don't label yourself or others.
- Talk to people — talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol.
- Reach out — people do care.
- Keep your life as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they're doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal and write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you may also be under stress.

Helpful Hints with Stress Response

The following ideas may help to alleviate the emotional pain associated with an event.

FOR YOURSELF:

- Try to rest a bit more.
- Contact friends.
- Have someone stay with you for at least a few hours or periods for a day or so.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal — don't try to fight them — they'll decrease over time.
- Reestablish and maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel like it).
- Try to keep a reasonable level of activity to fight against boredom.
- Physical activity is often helpful.
- Express your feelings as they arise.
- Talk to people who love you.
- Find a good counselor if the feelings become prolonged or too intense.

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS OF THE THOSE MOST STRONGLY IMPACTED:

- Listen carefully.
- Offer to spend time with the person with the stress response.
- Offer your assistance even 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 tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" — traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred, and you want to understand and assist.

If the symptoms described above are severe or if they last longer than six weeks, the traumatized person should seek professional help.

We're here to help!

If the stress reaction persists, contact your Assistance Program for support.