

COMMON RESPONSES TO TRAUMA – AND COPING STRATEGIES

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After a trauma, people may go through a wide range of normal responses. Such reactions may be experienced not only by people who experienced the trauma first-hand, but by those who have witnessed or heard about the trauma, or been involved with those immediately affected. Many reactions can be triggered by persons, places, or things associated with the trauma. Some reactions may appear totally unrelated.

Here is a list of common physical and emotional reactions to trauma, as well as a list of helpful coping strategies. These are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- aches and pains like headaches, backaches, stomach aches
- sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations (fluttering)
- changes in sleep patterns, appetite, interest in sex
- constipation or diarrhea
- easily startled by noises or unexpected touch
- more susceptible to colds and illnesses
- increased use of alcohol or drugs and/or overeating

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

- shock and disbelief
- fear and/or anxiety
- grief, disorientation, denial
- hyper-alertness or hypervigilance
- irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger or rage
- emotional swings – like crying and then laughing
- worrying or ruminating – intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- nightmares
- flashbacks – feeling like the trauma is happening now
- feelings of helplessness, panic, feeling out of control
- increased need to control everyday experiences
- minimizing the experience
- attempts to avoid anything associated with trauma
- tendency to isolate oneself
- feelings of detachment
- concern over burdening others with problems
- emotional numbing or restricted range of feelings
- difficulty trusting and/or feelings of betrayal
- difficulty concentrating or remembering
- feelings of self-blame and/or survivor guilt
- shame
- diminished interest in everyday activities or depression
- unpleasant past memories resurfacing
- loss of a sense of order or fairness in the world; expectation of doom and fear of the future

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