

## *Typical Reactions to Trauma*

It's very common, in fact quite normal, for people to have strong emotional or physical reactions after a traumatic event. While immediate trauma reactions surface quickly and are readily detectable, long-term reactions surface gradually and may be harder to identify.

Below are some of the common signs and signals of a trauma reaction. These are normal experiences we all feel, but pay attention when they occur more frequently or are stronger than usual. If they begin to interfere with your academic or personal life, please seek help.

- Shock or Numbness
- Anger or Irritability
- Sadness
- Confusion
- Terror
- Shame
- Suspiciousness or Paranoia
- Problems with concentration
- Anxiety
- Isolation from social support
- Emotional outbursts
- Disruptions in sleep and appetite
- Flashbacks or Nightmares
- Startle responses or Hypervigilance
- Physical symptoms (e.g. headaches, elevated heart rate, weakness)



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### **Things To Try:**

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOUR period of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time-keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions-don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people-talking is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out-people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat-answer them even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal-don't try to fight them-they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

### **For Family Members & Friends)**

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear 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 take their anger or other feelings personally.
- 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 even has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

#### **INSIGHT EAP**

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