

Common Responses Following Traumatic Events

It is very common and normal for people to have reactions after they have experienced a traumatic event or critical incident. It is becoming more common for people to experience stress reactions to highly publicized traumatic events even when they have not been directly involved. This type of stress reaction is often overlooked or dismissed.

Exposure to traumatic events, direct and indirect, affects each person differently. Sometimes reactions appear immediately after the event. Sometimes they appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before reactions appear.

Critical incident stress symptoms can last days, weeks, months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event and the individual's level of exposure.

There are many ways to manage stress reactions. When stress symptoms are particularly severe or do not improve over time, professional assistance may be helpful.

If your company offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), that's a good place to start; the EAP can assess the severity of your symptoms and connect you with appropriate resources.

Here is a list of some common signs of a critical incident stress reaction.

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| <p>Cognitive Reactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion/Difficulty Concentrating • Difficulty Making Decisions • Decreased Alertness/Memory Lapses • Intrusive Images/Thoughts • Nightmares • Replaying the Event • Disbelief • Search for Meaning | <p>Physical Reactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Insomnia • Headaches • Nausea/Gastrointestinal Problems • Hunger or Loss of Appetite • Rapid Breathing • Chest Pain (see a physician) • Dizziness (see a physician) |
| <p>Emotional Reactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Self Blame • Loss of Emotional Control • Depression • Emotional Numbness • Helplessness • Apathy/Boredom • Withdrawal from Others | <p>Behavioral Reactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspicion • Substance Abuse • Easily Startled • Changes in Normal Activities • Hypervigilance • Diminished Sexual Drive • Anger • Restlessness |