

COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

When you experience a traumatic or frightening event it is normal to have strong physical and emotional reactions that remain after the traumatic event is over. These reactions may last for a few days, weeks or even longer.

How you react will depend on a number of factors including: the severity and circumstances of the traumatic event, your personality, other stressors in your life and the supports available to you. Listed below are common reactions that people experience following a traumatic event. You may relate to some or many of these examples:

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Fatigue/exhaustion
 Disturbed sleep
 Nausea
 Nightmares
 Restlessness
 Headaches
 Excessive alertness and being easily startled

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Fear
 Numbness/detachment
 Avoidance
 Depression
 Guilt
 Over-sensitivity
 Anxiety/panic
 Withdrawal/tearfulness

MENTAL REACTIONS

Intrusive thoughts
 Confusion
 Reduced concentration and memory
 Flashbacks or replaying parts of the event
 Disorientation
 Inability to stop focussing on it
 A sense of losing time

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS

Avoiding reminders of the event
 Getting immersed in work for recovery
 Losing touch with normal routines
 Changed appetite, such as eating more or less
 Difficulty doing anything except familiar routines.

If you are finding these symptoms distressing or they persist after 3 weeks, we encourage you to seek help from the following people:
 Your doctor // Your local community health centre // Counsellor
 Psychologist // Lifeline 13 11 14

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RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA

Recognise that you have been through a distressing or frightening experience and that you will have a reaction to it.

Accept that you will not feel your normal self for a period of time, but that it will also eventually pass.

Remind yourself daily that you are managing – try not to get angry or frustrated with yourself if you are not able to do things as well or efficiently as normal.

Don't over use alcohol or drugs to help you cope.

Avoid making major decisions or big life changes until you feel better.

Gradually confront what has happened – don't try to block it out.

Try to keep to your normal routine and stay busy.

Don't bottle up your feelings – **talk to someone** who can support and understand you.

Don't go out of your way to avoid certain places or activities.

Don't let the trauma confine your life, take your time to get back to normal.

When you feel exhausted, make sure you **set aside time** to rest.

Make time for **regular exercise**, it helps release physical and psychological tension.

Help your family and friends to help you by telling them what you need, such as time out or someone to talk to.

Relax. Use relaxation techniques such as yoga, breathing or meditation, or do things you enjoy, such as listening to music or gardening.

Express your feelings as they arise – talk to someone about your feelings or write them down.

When the trauma brings up **memories or feelings**, try to confront them. Think about them, then put them aside. If it brings up other past memories, try to keep them separate from the current problem and deal with them separately.

