

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any incident that causes people to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later). Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event. Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by him/herself.

**Here are some very common signs and signals of a stress reaction:**

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Behavioral</b>
chest pain*	blaming someone	anxiety	change in society
difficulty breathing*	confusion	guilt	change in speech patterns
shock symptoms*	poor attention	grief	inability to rest
twitches	poor decisions	denial	withdrawal
fatigue	heightened or	severe panic (rare)	emotional outbursts
nausea	lowered alertness	emotional shock	suspiciousness
elevated BP	poor concentration	fear	change in/unusual
rapid heart rate	memory problems	uncertainty	communications
thirst	hypervigilance	loss of emotional	loss/increase of appetite
headaches	difficulty identifying	control	disturbed thinking
visual difficulties	familiar objects or	depression	alcohol consumption
vomiting	people	inappropriate	pacing
grinding of teeth	increased or	emotional response	antisocial acts
weakness	decreased awareness	apprehension	nonspecific bodily complaints
dizziness	of surroundings	feeling overwhelmed	hyper alert to environment
profuse sweating	poor problem-solving	intense anger	startle reflex intensified
chills	poor abstract thinking	irritability	erratic movements
muscle tremors	loss of time, place or	agitation	change in sexual functioning
fainting	person orientation		
	nightmares		
	intrusive images		

*\*Definite indication of the need for medical evaluation*

### Things To Try

- Within the first 24/48 hours, periods of strenuous 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 – talk 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 or friends 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 and 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 event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

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