

How to Manage Reactions to Trauma and Stress

Over the next few weeks, you and/or your students may experience a number of reactions to the current tragedy. Having a reaction is both normal and expected. Following is a list of common reactions to stressful events and situations.

Physical Reactions

Fatigue/exhaustion
Sleep disturbance
Under activity/over activity
Change in appetite
Digestive problems
Nightmares
Muscle tremors/twitches
Headaches
Startled reactions

Cognitive Reactions

Difficulty concentrating
Difficulty solving problems
Flashbacks of the events
Difficulty making decisions
Memory disturbance
Preoccupation with the event
Lowered attention span
Violent fantasies

Emotional Reactions

Guilt
Feelings of helplessness
Emotional numbing
Overly sensitive
Fear/Anxiety
Sense of hopelessness
Hyper-vigilance
Anger/irritability
Moodiness

In addition to the above reactions, you and/or your students may experience a period of mild to moderate depression. These symptoms include:

Poor appetite
Social withdrawal/isolation
Persistent sad mood

Insomnia
Loss of sexual drive
Sleep disturbance

Lethargy/low energy
Difficulty concentrating
Intrusive thoughts

Again, these are normal reactions. Although painful, they are part of the recovery process. Where there is little anyone can do to take away these uncomfortable feelings, there are several things you can do to speed up the recovery process.

Things to try:

1. Within 24-48 hours, engage in periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation (soothing music would be an additional bonus to your system).
2. Structure your time. Keep busy and keep your life as normal as possible.
3. Don't berate yourself for having these reactions. After all, they are signs of your humanity.
4. Talk to people about your feelings, fears, and uncertainties.
5. Do not attempt to numb your emotional pain with drugs or alcohol.
6. Reach out to others and spend time with people you trust and cherish.
7. Help someone express his or her feelings. A very cathartic experience should be shared.
8. Give yourself permission to fall apart, feel rotten, and cry.
9. Keep a journal. Write your way through those sleepless hours.
10. Pray, meditate, and appreciate the sanctity of life. Tomorrow is never promised.

If after several days you find that you are still having difficulty adjusting to school and other parts of your life, don't hesitate to contact us. If you are a student contact Psychological Counseling Services at (916) 278-6416. Faculty and staff can call the Employee Assistance Program (916) 278-5018. We can help you get through this part of the healing process. We are also available to speak to groups of students, faculty, and staff.