



Recognizing Stress Reactions following a Traumatic Event

When people experience a traumatic event, or critical incident, it is normal to experience many different types of reactions. Changes in how people feel emotionally or physically, think and even behave can occur immediately, but also even hours or days after the event is over. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before a stress reaction appears.

It is important to remember that most people who experience a traumatic event begin to heal with the natural supports around them. However, being aware of common reactions can help normalize the experience and provide information to individuals about how to begin to cope. Monitoring signs and symptoms for severity and duration can also help guide when a referral to more formal or professional help may be needed.

See the reverse side for common signs and signals of stress reactions.

Common Signs and Signals of a Stress Reaction

<i>Physical*</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>
Chills	Confusion	Fear	Withdrawal
Thirst	Nightmares	Guilt	Antisocial acts
Fatigue	Uncertainty	Grief	Inability to rest
Nausea	Hypervigilance	Panic	Intensified pacing
Fainting	Suspiciousness	Denial	Erratic movements
Twitches	Intrusive images	Anxiety	Changes in social activity
Vomiting	Blaming someone	Agitation	Changes in speech patterns
Dizziness	Poor problem solving	Irritability	Changes in appetite
Weakness	Poor abstract thinking	Depression	Hyperalert to environment
Chest pain	Poor attention/ decisions	Intense anger	Increased alcohol consumption
Headaches	Poor concentration/ memory	Apprehension	Changes in usual communication
Elevated BP	Disorientation of time, place or person	Emotional outbursts	
Rapid heartrate	Difficulty identifying objects or people	Loss of emotional control	
Muscle tremors	Heightened or lowered alertness	Inappropriate emotional response	
Shock symptoms	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	Emotional shock	
Grinding teeth		Feeling overwhelmed	
Visual difficulties			
Profuse sweating			
Difficulty breathing			

***Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for a medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.**