



# The Psychological Services Group

*Dedicated Service to Those Who Serve*

## PERSONAL RESPONSES TO CRISIS

When unexpected, traumatic events occur, it is normal to have strong reactions. Sometimes these appear immediately after the event, and sometimes they don't evidence themselves for several days, weeks, or even months. While unpleasant, these reactions are normal and usually temporary, leaving no long-term effects on the individual experiencing them. The following alterations to your normal state may last from a few days to a few weeks.

### EMOTIONAL

Anxiety  
Fear  
Loss of confidence  
Numbness  
Uncertainty  
Apathy  
Sadness  
Depression  
Excessive worry  
Anger  
Irritability  
Guilt  
Grief  
Disbelief  
Distress

### PHYSICAL

Fatigue  
Restlessness  
Headaches  
Muscle Ache  
Digestive distress  
Changes in libido  
Rapid Breathing\*  
Chest tightness\*  
Sleep disturbance  
Profuse sweating  
Diarrhea  
Tachycardia\*  
Thirst  
Easily startled  
Trembling hands

### COGNITIVE

Forgetfulness  
Confusion  
Disorientation  
Distractibility  
Impaired memory  
Concentration  
Reviewing of  
previous trauma  
Intrusive thoughts  
Intrusive images  
Numbing of  
responses  
Suspiciousness  
Nightmares  
Hypervigilance

### BEHAVIORAL

Isolating  
Withdrawal  
Increase use EtOH  
Restless agitation  
Impulsive acts  
Interpersonal conflicts  
Changes in eating,  
sleeping, sexual  
behavior  
Increased risk taking  
Avoidance  
Inability to rest  
Change in social activity

\*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation.  
When in doubt, contact your medical provider.

While each of these can be an unexpected or unwelcome response to crisis, there are things to try that may be useful in reducing the impact of the event and it's aftermath. Many of these activities can help to restore function and wellbeing in the aftermath of a critical incident.

1. Remember, you are a normal person experiencing normal reactions to a highly abnormal event.
2. While alcohol may temporarily mask the initial symptoms of stress, the use of alcohol or other substances will delay the normal recovery process overall.
3. Within the first 24-48 hours periods of moderate physical activity can be very helpful and will help to aid sleep, digestion, and mood regulation.
4. Make sure you are eating regularly. The healthier your choices the better you will feel. Increase water consumption and avoid excessive caffeine.
5. Get enough sleep. Sleep is one of the most important factors in returning to normal pre-incident functioning. If you experience sleep disturbance for more than two or three days please consult your medical provider or your debriefing clinician.
6. Reach out. People do care. Nurture and maintain your relationships by talking; talk is the most healing medicine.
7. Maintain as normal a schedule as possible. Returning to activities you've previously found engaging or relaxing is a good way to engage the brain in non-trauma focus.
8. Talking to your significant other, friends, or trusted associates about what you are experiencing help put the aftermath of a critical incident in perspective. You are not alone.
9. Realize that those around you are under stress, too. Give yourself permission to feel rotten but don't assume that your loved ones know what you are experiencing. Educate them.
10. Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will restore your sense of control over your life. Don't make any big life decisions or changes.
11. Don't try to fight the intrusive and recurring thoughts, dreams, or images – they are a normal way for the brain to process what has just occurred. They will decrease over time and become less painful.
12. Remind yourself that you are first responder not a magician. We cannot change anyone else. We cannot alter the reality of the incident we have just endured. We can only change the way we relate and react to them.
13. Seek help if you find your responses intensifying or becoming too intrusive in your life. Pay attention when your family or friends report that you are different.