

Trauma Response Information Sheet

Adapted from Lerner, M. D. and Shelton, R. D. (2005). *Comprehensive Acute Traumatic Stress Management: CATSM*. The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress: Commack, NY.

The following acute stress reactions are experienced by people during a traumatic event and are normal responses to an abnormal event. The problem is when the following reactions are experienced weeks, months and years after the event and are joined by other symptoms like recurrent disturbing dreams, flashbacks, avoidance behaviors and dissociations.

Emotional Responses

- Shock
- Highly anxious; hyper-active
- Stunned; emotionally numb
- In a fog; apathetic
- Denial, dissociation, amnesia
- Feeling of unreality
- Panic
- Fear
- Intense feeling of aloneness
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Emptiness
- Uncertainty
- Horror
- Terror
- Anger
- Hostility
- Irritability
- Depression
- Grief
- Feelings of guilt

Cognitive Responses

- Impaired concentration
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Difficulty making decisions
- Short attention span
- Suggestibility
- Vulnerability
- Forgetfulness
- Self-blame
- Blaming others
- Lowered self-efficacy
- Thoughts of losing control

- Hyper vigilance
- Continually thinking about incident; playing tape over and over again

Physiological Responses

- Rapid heart beat
- Elevated blood pressure
- Difficulty breathing*
- Shock symptoms*
- Chest pains*
- Cardiac palpitations*
- Muscle tension and pains
- Fatigue
- Fainting
- Flushed face
- Pale appearance
- Chills
- Cold, clammy skin
- Increased sweating
- Thirst
- Dizziness
- Vertigo
- Hyperventilation
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth
- Gastrointestinal upset
- Freeze

***Requires immediate medical attention**

Behavioral Responses

- Withdrawal, spacing out
- No communication
- Changes in speech patterns
- Regressive behaviors
- Erratic movements
- Impulsivity
- Reluctance to abandon property
- Aimlessly walking, pacing
- Inability to sit still
- Exaggerated startle response
- Anti-social behaviors
- Amnesia, partial or complete

Spiritual Responses

- Anger and distance from God
- Withdrawal from attending services; anger at clergy
- Sudden turn towards God
- Increased involvement in religious community
- Praying, saying scripture, hymns
- Praying doesn't comfort like it used to
- Life empty without meaning
- God is powerless; individual feels unprotected and abandoned
- Question beliefs previously held
- Happened to me because I'm being punished