

## Coping with Trauma

During and following a workplace traumatic event or critical incident, people may experience a range of disconcerting reactions. These reactions, or stress responses, may be physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural. These responses can be brief, transitory or long-lasting. It's important to understand that these are normal reactions to an abnormal event.

### Common Reactions

Physical Responses	Emotional Responses	Mental Responses	Behavioural Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in sleep patterns</li> <li>• Change in appetite</li> <li>• Shallow, rapid breathing</li> <li>• Dizziness/ headaches</li> <li>• Muscle tension</li> <li>• Increased heart rate</li> <li>• Stomach upset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shock or numbness</li> <li>• Anger towards others involved</li> <li>• Fear (i.e., Of being alone)</li> <li>• Sadness or worsening depression</li> <li>• Guilt/ frustration</li> <li>• Feeling unsafe or vulnerable</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• Difficulty remembering details of the event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal from others</li> <li>• Angry outbursts/ crying</li> <li>• Increased use of alcohol or medications</li> <li>• Irritability/ startle response</li> <li>• Decreased energy or ambition</li> <li>• Relationship conflict</li> </ul>

### Stress Management Tips

- Care for yourself by eating well, exercising, and resting when needed. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, chocolate and nicotine and depressants such as alcohol.
- Seek out comfortable, familiar surroundings and avoid spending too much time alone.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with those who are supportive and helpful – don't try to block recollections. It helps to talk about them. Feel free to set boundaries with people who have not been helpful in the past.
- Don't be unsettled if reactions from past traumas re-emerge even though you may have felt those issues were resolved – it is part of your healing.
- **Give yourself time to recover.** Difficulties with concentration, memory or decision-making are common but short-term reactions. Seek help if reactions are interfering with job responsibilities. Focus on concrete, easily achievable tasks.
- Remember that difficulty **sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks and feelings of being “hyper-alert” are common and will diminish in time.**
- Avoid personalizing or taking responsibility for how others respond to the traumatic event. Do not compare or measure your reactions to those of other people—each individual's experience is unique and personal.
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## Stress Management Tips

- Communicate your feelings clearly. Others may not know how to respond to you appropriately. Let them know which responses are helpful and which are not.
- Know that anniversary dates or a specific holiday may trigger feelings related to the trauma. This is normal.
- Seek help from a professional counselor if symptoms persist – call **1-866-990-1113** to access your EAP

Following a traumatic experience, many people also experience positive changes in what they prioritize, their worldview and their expectations. These changes can include:

- Feeling greater awareness that family and friends are precious and important;
- Being proactive in addressing difficulties (i.e. taking positive action steps, changing the focus of thoughts, using humour, acceptance);
- Shifting expectations about what is reasonable to expect day to day, and adjusting your criteria for a “good day”;
- Focusing on spending quality time with those whom you care about; and
- Increased commitment to self, family, friends, and spiritual/religious faith.