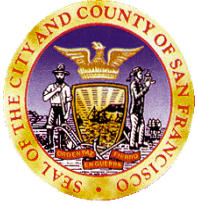


*Adapted from the Federal Emergency Management Agency
4200 West Cypress Street, Tampa Florida 33607*



COMMON REACTIONS OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Traumatic Events or Deaths by
Disaster and Stress Management Consultants
Leonard M. Zunin, M.D. Assistant to the Director
California Department of Mental Health
Diane Myers, R.N., M.S.N.
Private Consultant

Even otherwise healthy individuals may feel stress as a result of disasters, traumatic events or deaths, whether by natural or human causes. Stress reactions are often natural responses in normal people to unnatural events.

Everyone may experience some stress reactions as a result of these kinds of traumatic incidents. Typically, these feelings don't last long, and for some, they may not begin to appear for weeks or sometimes even months after the event.

Reactions vary, but may include one or more of the following:

Physical

- Sweating
- Heart Racing
- Fatigue, Weakness
- Headaches, Body Aches
- Shortness of Breath
- Nausea or Vomiting
- Shifts in Appetite
- Sleep Problems

Emotional

- Anger
- Sadness/Depression
- Guilt
- Irritability
- Crying
- Insecurity
- Flashbacks
- Anxiety/Fear
- Nightmares

Thinking

- Poor concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Mental Confusion
- Difficulty Making Decisions

Behavioral

- Hyperactivity/Restlessness
- Withdrawl/or Fear of Being Alone
- Increased use of Drugs or Alcohol
- "Robot-Like" Behavior

All of the above feelings and reactions are normal and natural even though they may seem unusual and even though some are very different from others. We are all individuals. We all respond in our own way, differently and uniquely.

The memory of the stressful event/incident will probably always be part of your life. It cannot be erased, nor should it be. Memory is essential for healing.

Everyone moves at their own pace through the states of crises and healing. Passing through a crisis will help some people cope with future challenges more effectively.

If the reactions to stress and feelings of anxiety, depression, or physical ailments continue, professional consultation is advisable.

SUGGESTIONS: Productive Steps to Enhance Recovery:

1. Respect the need for patience and expect change with the passage of time.
2. Be willing to talk about what happened and express your thoughts. Talking about the incident and your reactions is critical to healing.
3. Share your feelings rather than holding them in. This will help you feel better about your experience and heal more rapidly.
4. Be gentle with yourself -- there are always things we could have done differently. "If onlys" are a frequent temporary way the mind reflects back.
5. Draw on supports that nurture you during your time off. This may include friends, reading, recreation, religion, prayer, meditation and exercise.
6. Take care of yourself physically: good diet, adequate sleep, rest and exercise, even on a long daily walk, will help you considerably.
7. If needed, give yourself permission to spend some time alone after work, but don't totally withdraw from social interaction.
8. Keeping a journal can be helpful as a release. You may find writing a healing, and a creative and important reflection of your experience.
9. Stop from time-to-time to take four or five deep, cleansing breaths is rejuvenating and relaxing.
10. Attend debriefing groups and stress education programs that may be offered.

NEGATIVE COPING BEHAVIORS:

1. Abusing alcohol or drugs; self medication.
2. Overeating or eating sugar and junk food snacks.
3. Neglecting health and grooming;
4. Becoming distracted, reckless and accident prone.
5. Isolating oneself from social interaction