

Am I Normal? Reactions to Overwhelming Stressful Events

Most people have reactions to traumatic events or other overwhelming situations. These experiences may affect your ability to function and take care of yourself. Everyone reacts differently, based on personal experiences. Sometimes it appears that there is no reaction at all, sometimes the reaction is immediate, and sometimes reactions are delayed.

Common reactions to a death, near death or overwhelming event are:

Thoughts:

- Re-enacting the event over and over in your mind

Physical Reactions:

- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Trouble concentrating

Emotional Reactions:

- Feeling stressed
- Feeling anxious
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling numb
- Irritability
- Nightmares
- Sadness
- Anger
- Apprehension

Changes in Behaviors:

- Increase in risk-taking
- Change in appetite
- Sleep problems
- Increase in use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawal

What can I do to feel better?

- ◆ Get involved in activities that you can start and finish in one day.
- ◆ Eat healthy foods and get physical exercise.
- ◆ Talk openly with a friend or person you trust about your feelings.
- ◆ Spend time doing things you enjoy, even if it is hard.
- ◆ Support a friend – this is remarkably healing.
- ◆ Listen to music you think is positive.

When do I need to get additional help?

- ◆ If you continue to have trouble functioning normally, weeks or months after the events.
- ◆ When you have a friend who has these reactions and is not getting better.
- ◆ When you have thoughts of harming or killing yourself or someone else.
- ◆ If you are feeling overwhelmed or out of control.
- ◆ When you are not taking care of yourself.

Where can I get help?

- ◆ Parent, Friend (who is not overwhelmed), or Relative: _____
- ◆ Others (who would you put in?): _____
- ◆ School Guidance Counselor or nurse: _____
- ◆ Pastor or another adult you trust: _____
- ◆ Counseling Services: _____
- ◆ **Statewide Crisis Hotline: 1-888-568-1112**
- ◆ **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**