

Self-Care after Experiencing a Stressful Event

Trauma affects people differently. Stressful events can create strong emotional and physical reactions. Reactions can appear almost immediately or occur hours, days and sometimes even weeks later. It is important to remember that such reactions are common and *normal* after experiencing or witnessing a distressing event.

Positive Self-Care Behaviors:

- Use natural supports. Spend time with people you are comfortable being with. Talk and share your feelings at your own pace. Let others know what would be helpful to you. Reaching out to others can help prevent isolation.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible, don't "overdo" it.
- Realize that you may temporarily function below your normal pace and ability for a little while.
- Allow yourself to cry.
- Find things to make you feel safe.
- Eat regularly, focusing on balanced, nutritional meals.
- Get enough rest.
- Maintain physical activities.
- Practice relaxation techniques - muscle relaxation, breathing techniques, meditation, stretching, prayer, quiet reflection, spend time in nature, listen to music, etc.
- Offer assistance in ways that help you combat feeling helpless and increase your sense of control.
- Spend time with children.
- Allow yourself to smile and laugh.
- Beware of trying to numb feelings with overuse of alcohol or other drugs.
- Utilize professional resources if intensity of reactions is causing severe distress, significant changes in relationships or are impairing usual functioning.

Another important point to remember is that these reactions typically subside over time. Receiving support from colleagues, family and friends usually helps the stress reactions to diminish and pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful and overwhelming that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply weakness. Rather, it simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the individual to manage him/herself. If you are experiencing extreme symptoms of stress such as trouble sleeping, inability to carry out your daily routine, using drugs or alcohol to cope or eating too much or too little please **contact PAS at 919-416-1727**.

COMMON REACTIONS TO DISTRESSING EVENTS

Physical Responses

- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in appetite
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate
- Stomach upset

Emotional Responses

- Shock or numbness
- Anger toward others
- Fear
- Depression
- Guilt/Frustration
- Sadness
- Feeling unsafe or vulnerable
- Loneliness

Mental Responses

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering details of event

Behavioral Responses:

- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts
- Crying
- Irritability
- Decreased energy
- Relationship conflict
- Increased use of alcohol or medications
- Fear of being alone