

Reactions to Trauma

The initial shock following a crime, sudden death, accident or other trauma is a painful reality for everyone involved. Many times right after a horrible or shocking event a person is in shock and may feel “frozen” or numb and may not be able to remember simple things like phone numbers or where the car is. Often a person may not even believe what has happened. It is also common to have no particular feelings at all about the event for a while.

Eventually, even though the event is over, it is normal for a person to experience strong emotional or physical reactions. Sometimes the reactions appear immediately after the event or they may appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before stress reactions are felt.

People are often surprised that reactions to trauma are more intense and can last longer than expected. It may take weeks, months and, in some cases, years to feel healed. Many people will get through this period on their own with the help and support of friends and family. Often, however, well-meaning family and friends might push a loved one to “get over it”. Sometimes a traumatic event is so disturbing or painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be helpful. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It means that the event is just too powerful for the person to manage alone.

Common Reactions to Trauma

- ... *shock and disbelief*
- ... *having unwanted memories*
- ... *anxiety or panicky feelings*
- ... *feeling “lost” or “out of it”*
- ... *being near tears more of the time*
- ... *increased irritability*
- ... *sleep disturbances*
- ... *loss of appetite*
- ... *depression*
- ... *headache, nausea, or physical pain*
- ... *disruption of family life*
- ... *withdrawal*
- ... *loss of interest in activities
previously enjoyed*
- ... *flashbacks, recurring nightmares*
- ... *guilt*
- ... *confusion, difficulty concentrating*

Children’s Reactions to Trauma

Children might react to trauma with feelings of confusion, anger, guilt and fear. Frequently they will regress in behavior, i.e., wanting to become a baby again and wetting the bed. They also may become irritable, clingy and cranky. Children might have trouble sleeping and may seem to need more attention and comfort than usual. They may feel unsafe and may not understand what has happened, which could cause them to feel frightened and frustrated. It is not uncommon for children to have nightmares, which could begin as nightmares of the event, but could become more generalized like dreams of monsters. Children will commonly feel afraid after a traumatic loss of familiar people and surroundings.

It is helpful for children to talk about their experiences, draw pictures or play out events. They may need to do this over and over because children will understand only small parts of the traumatic event each time. Giving children hugs and attention encourages them to talk and express their feelings. This will help them to get through the experience in a healthy way.



To help yourself, you can...

...structure your life as much as possible. Make small daily decisions to feel more in control.

...avoid making major life decisions during this difficult time. This probably is not a good time to move, change jobs, or add more pressure.

...allow yourself to experience uncomfortable recurring feelings.

...talk about your feelings. Make the time to meet with a friend or family member who can and will support you.

...do nice things for yourself. This won't "fix" anything but it might lift your spirits for a little while.

...eat regularly and nutritionally. You may not have an appetite but your body still needs the nutrition.

...limit your use of alcohol and/or drugs. If you need help to sleep, talk with your doctor.

...increase your physical exercise.

...give yourself permission to feel down.

...know that there is no "right" way to feel. Whatever your feelings are, they are normal, appropriate reactions to an abnormal situation.

Family and Friends can help.

As a friend or family member, you can...

...listen carefully and spend time with the person. Reassure him or her that it's safe now and his or her feelings are normal. Say you are sorry this happened.

...avoid offering easy answers or giving advice.

...help with specific tasks or errands. This can be helpful since people feel unfocused and unable to make decisions.

...avoid blaming the person or saying "you are lucky it wasn't worse". It is important to support them through this difficult time.

...avoid talking about your own experiences. The person needs to self-focus at this time.

...stay involved in the person's recovery. Ask how you can best be supportive and help find available services

...remember that each person experiences trauma differently. Be understanding of the different ways in which each person copes and the different pace at which each person heals.

Community Resources

Medical

Northern Colorado Medical Center	970-352-4121
McKee Medical Center	970-669-4640
Longmont United Hospital	303-651-5000
Platte Valley Medical Center	303-498-1600
Medical Center of the Rockies	970-624-2500
Good Samaritan Hospital	303-689-6933
The Children's Hospital	720-777-1234

Crisis and Referral

Domestic Violence Safe House:	
Boulder	303-444-2424
Longmont	303-772-4422
Woman's Place	970-356-4226
Sexual Assault Victims Advocate Ctr.	970-472-4200
Rape Crisis Hotline (MESA)	303-443-7300
Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley	303-772-4422
North Range Behavioral Health	970-347-2120
	Or 303-857-2724
Suicide Education & Support	970-313-1089
Department of Human Services	970-353-3800
	Or 303-857-2725
	Or 720-652-4209
	970-352-1551

Social Services

United Way Information 211

Law Enforcement

Colorado State Patrol	970-506-4999
Dacono Police Department	303-833-5526
Erie Police Department	303-926-2800
Firestone Police Department	303-833-0811
Fort Lupton Police Department	303-857-4011
Frederick Police Department	303-833-2468
Lochbuie Police Department	303-659-1395
Platteville Police Department	970-785-2215
Nunn Police Department	970-897-2561
Weld County Coroner's Office	970-392-4545
Weld County District Attorney	970-356-4010

Victim Witness Dial 2

Victim Compensation Extension 4676

Weld County Sheriff's Office

Toll Free	1-800-436-9276
Jail and Administration	970-356-4015
Communication Center (Dispatch)	970-356-1212

Emergencies 911



Emotional Responses to Trauma



Weld County Sheriff's Office

Victim Services Unit

1950 "O" St.

Greeley, CO, 80631

970-400-2878