



WHEN SOMETHING AWFUL HAS HAPPENED:

The effects of traumatic stress and what you may experience

Anyone who has experienced or witnessed a horrible event in which their physical safety or life, or the life of a loved one was in danger has experienced traumatic stress. Survivors may feel like life isn't the same anymore. You or your loved one may experience a variety of physical, emotional, cognitive, or behavioral reactions, many of which are completely normal and understandable. This is a traumatic stress reaction.

Common Reactions may include

PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	COGNITIVE	BEHAVIORAL
Fatigue	Fear and Anxiety	Confusion	Withdrawal
Sweating	Guilt and Shame	Worry	Avoidance
Gastro-Intestinal upset	Shock and Numb	Disorientation	Loss of interest
Difficulties Sleeping	Anger	Poor concentration	Interpersonal conflict
Startling easily	Irritability	Poor attention	
Headaches and Stomachaches	Sorrow, Grief and Sadness	Intrusive thoughts/images	

Coping with Traumatic Stress

What can help:

Give yourself **time to heal**, allow yourself to mourn
Reach out and connect with others, ask for support
Engage in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
 Get enough **rest** and **eat** healthy meals
 Try to maintain your **routine** and **schedule**
Relaxation techniques (meditation, breathing exercises, soothing music)
 Keep a journal

What **doesn't** help:

Isolating yourself from your support network of family and friends
 Keeping quiet because you are worried about becoming a burden
 Using **alcohol or drugs** to cope
Working too much
Avoiding thinking about the event or death of a loved one
Blaming others
Overeating or failing to eat

When to seek help

It is not unusual to find that your self-help strategies are not working or the common reactions above persist. If they are affecting your job performance or interpersonal relationships, or you find yourself using drugs or alcohol to cope, please seek help.

Resources

- Your Primary Care Physician (PCP) / Your Pediatrician
- Boston Emergency Services Team (BEST) – Mental Health Crisis Line **800.981.4357**
- MGH Acute Psychiatry Service (APS) – 24hr psychiatrists. **617.724.7688**
- **911** or the nearest emergency room if suicidal or dangerous thoughts

More Information

- www.apahelpcenter.com
- www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov