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[www.minesandassociates.com](http://www.minesandassociates.com)

## Emotional Responses to Trauma

People who experience a trauma tend to go through predictable phases. The phases usually occur in the following order but may appear in any sequence.

**SHOCK:** can last from a few hours to one week. This can result in feeling immobilization, such as you can't remember simple things like your own telephone number, where your keys are kept, what time it is, etc. Shock is followed by denial. You don't really believe what is happening or has happened. Often you deny the fact that you were frightened and/or anxious.

**IMPACT:** starts sometime after the incident and can last up to two weeks. This is characterized by anger, sometimes directed towards your employer, fellow employees, police, or just society in general. The anger is usually dependent on what happened. In this phase you question yourself on how well you handled the situation and such self-questions as, "Did I do the right thing?" This is the "what if" time when you think about what could have happened, or how you might have reacted differently. These self-doubts are common and expected. Another frequent occurrence in this impact phase is the onset of depression. You can give in to feelings of hopelessness and impotence, unable to think of positive outcomes, see yourself as a helpless victim, and blame yourself for poor judgment and bad decisions.

**RESOLUTION:** may go on for up to two months. The first step is realizing that you probably did a good job with the "incident". The last step is one of acceptance. You really understand what has happened and that fear is human. You also stop second guessing yourself or blaming yourself or others.

If you have had a medical problem such as gastrointestinal disorder, hypertension, diabetes, seizure disorders, etc., be particularly aware of any changes in these medical conditions and seek medical evaluation immediately. A certain amount of emotional distress is common after a trauma. If the anxiety, fear at work, depression or sleep disorders continue for more than a few days, you should seek professional assistance to help you with these difficulties. Do not be alone immediately following the incident. Avoid alcohol or other drugs that are not prescribed.

Dreaming about the incident is common but should go away in a couple of weeks. There may be times where you think or feel that the incident is reoccurring, something like a "mini-flashback".

You should talk about the experience with family and friends, and if possible, with people who were there. The more you can talk about what happened with people who understand, the sooner the difficulties will pass, and the associated problems will diminish.

**REMBEMBER: The EAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Any use is completely confidential**

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## **Critical Incident Stress Reactions**

**Nancy Rich, M.A.**

Over the next month you will experience **normal** reactions to the kind of experience you've had which may include:

### **Physical Reactions**

- Fatigue
- Insomnia (which may turn into hypersomnia)
- Exhaustion
- Health problems (such as change in appetite, headaches, digestive problems)

### **Behavioral Reactions**

- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty with concentration
- Inability to attach importance to anything other than this incident
- Flashbacks
- Startle reactions
- Memory disturbance
- Isolating
- Underactivity
- Nightmares

### **Psychological Reactions**

- Guilt
- Fear
- Emotional sensitivity
- Anger-which may be manifest by: scapegoating, irritability, frustration with bureaucracy, violent fantasies.
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feelings of helplessness
- Amnesia for the event

These normal reactions, although painful, are part of the healing process. The feelings you experience may be uncomfortable, but there are things you can do to feel more whole.

### **Things to Try:**

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS, periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time - keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions - don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people - talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out - people do care.
- Keep your lives as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your coworkers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they're doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- The Nutrition Almanac recommends supplementing your diet with Vitamin C, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B6, Calcium and Magnesium.

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### **Dealing With Grief When Someone You Know Is Grieving**

Grief is experienced on many levels. We know that grief can be responsible for physical as well as emotional symptoms. It is easy to become confused as to what is normal and what is not. Grief serves as a useful healing function when allowed to run its course. The outcome of the grief process should be the resolution of the hurt and the re-establishment of one's life.

### **Helpful Suggestions When Someone You Know Is Grieving**

- Allow the person time to grieve. There is no time limit on grief. Be present physically as well as emotionally.
- Ask the person grieving what they need. Be prepared to offer suggestions such as house cleaning, meal preparation, or walking the dog.
- Allow the person to talk, cry, be angry, or ask why.
- Keep in touch after the funeral or memorial service. Reach out to them since they may be unable to reach out to you.
- Don't avoid the person because you aren't sure what to say. Just being there may help.
- Avoid saying "I know how you feel."
- Realize that your friend's grief may stir up memories for you.

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## 25 Ways to Reduce Stress

1. **Physical exercise** - develop an exercise routine that is aerobic and fun. Stick to it more religiously when under high stress. This does more to reduce acute stress than anything else you can do.
2. **Eat regular, nutritional meals** - foods low in fat, sodium, and simple sugar and high in carbohydrates are the best. Eat as though you are in training. Mealtimes should be as stress free as possible.
3. **Supplement your diet with vitamins and minerals** - your body uses up its B vitamins, C vitamins and calcium during stress; if your diet does not provide enough of these, take supplements.
4. **Avoid excessive use of alcohol and caffeine** - caffeine causes a stress response so it is not recommended when already under stress. Alcohol is a depressant and does not help you feel better.
5. **Post notes to yourself** - the memory is affected by stress so write reminders to yourself. When making appointments, write when they are and directions to them in your appointment book.
6. **Prepare for morning the night before** - put things you need to take with you by the door. Decide what you're going to wear and be sure it's ready.
7. **Get up 15 minutes early** - this gives you time for unforeseen things.
8. **Anticipate your needs** - stop for gas before you really need it. Keep cash and coins on hand.
9. **Allow extra time to get where you need to go** - this way if there are traffic delays you will not increase your stress.
10. **Walk everywhere you can** - it's good exercise and it gives you the opportunity to smell the flowers.

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11. **Schedule quiet times** - especially helpful is quiet just before bed and first thing in the morning. In addition, some quiet time during the day may be helpful.
12. **Keep your sense of humor** - seeing the humor in a situation will help keep your stress low.
13. **Relax your standards** - you don't have to do everything perfectly.
14. **Find a serene place of your own** - even if it's just a comfortable chair in a corner.
15. **Change your perspective** - ask yourself what this all matters in the march of the universe.
16. **Take advantage of your body rhythms** - schedule your most difficult tasks for your peak hours and less difficult tasks for other times.
17. **Have fun** - we can't be serious all the time.
18. **Say "no more" often** - you need to pick the activities on which you want to spend your life energy.
19. **Reward yourself after stressful activities** - relax with a book, listen to music, have a special lunch, or take a long, leisurely bath.
20. **Spend time with others** - preferably with others not involved in your work.
21. **Keep a journal** - writing down inner thoughts is a way of release, as well as providing a journal for later contemplation.
22. **Get plenty of rest** - schedule extra sleep time during times of stress. When you can't sleep, get up and do something non-stimulating.
23. **Don't make big life changes** - stressful times are not the time to change everything.
24. **Keep schedules as normal as possible** - the semblance of routine helps.
25. **Don't give yourself negative labels** - you are not "losing it," you are reacting to stress in a normal way.

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