

Common Responses to Traumatic Events

Although trauma affects people differently, there are some common reactions that you may experience. These signs and symptoms may begin immediately, or you may feel fine for a couple of days or even weeks, then suddenly be hit with a reaction. The most important thing to remember is that these reactions are quite normal. Although it may seem abnormal, it is very normal for people to experience emotional “after shocks” following a traumatic event.

Some common responses to traumatic events are:

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Hyperactivity
- Pains in the neck or back
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations or pains in the chest*
- Dizzy spells
- Appetite changes

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

- Flashbacks or “reliving” the event
- Jumpiness; tendency to startle
- Irritability
- Anger
- Feelings of anxiety/helplessness
- Feeling vulnerable
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Low motivation, listlessness

*If symptoms persist, consult a physician

EFFECTS ON PRODUCTIVITY

- Inability to concentrate
- Increased incidence of errors
- Memory lapses
- Increased absenteeism
- Tendency to overwork/underwork

Usually, the signs and symptoms of trauma will lessen with time. If you are concerned about your reaction, note the specific symptoms that worry you. For each symptom, note the:

- Duration – Normally, trauma reactions will grow less intense and disappear within a few weeks.
- Intensity – If the reaction interferes with your ability to carry on your life normally, you may want to seek help.

After a Traumatic Incident: Things to try

For you:

- Physical exercise alternated with relaxation may help with some of the symptoms and reactions. Consult your doctor if they persist.
- You are normal and having normal reactions. Don't label yourself as abnormal.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Spend time with others. Resist the tendency to isolate.
- Help your coworkers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through sleepless times.
- Don't make major life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your live.
- Get plenty of rest and eat regular meals, even if you don't feel like it.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal. Don't try to fight them. They will decrease over time and become less painful.

For family and friends:

- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if you haven't been asked for help.
- Don't take stress reactions experienced by others (anger, irritability) personally.
- Spend time with each other. Keep talking about what happened.

If you are concerned that your trauma response is too intense, or is lasting too long, seek professional assistance at Florida Tech's Counseling & Psychological Services 674-8050.