

Stress Response Information: A Handout for Students



You have experienced a traumatic event, something which may cause strong physical or emotional reactions. It is very *normal* for people to experience emotional after-shocks when they have gone through a horrible event.

The signs of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or sometimes longer. You should start feeling better after about a week. If you don't start getting better after about three weeks, talk to your parents, your teacher, or counselor. They will know what to do.

These are some symptoms of a stress reaction:

Physical

Fatigue
Profuse sweating
Muscle tremors
Twitches
Nausea
Chills
Can't eat
Vomiting
Dizziness
Headaches
Cramps
Grinding of teeth

Cognitive

Memory Loss
Loss of concentration
Flashbacks
Confusion
Poor attention span
Nightmares
Poor decision making
Intrusive thoughts
Blaming someone
Poor problem solving
Increased/decreased awareness of surroundings

Emotional

Anxiety
Grief/Sadness
Guilt
Hopelessness
Anger
Depression
Fear
Feeling overwhelmed
Panic
Emotional shock
Irritability
Avoidance behaviors

Asking for help to deal with stress reactions does not mean that there is something seriously wrong with you.. It simply means that what happened was just too powerful to manage all by yourself.

Remember! Most stress responses are normal reactions by normal people to abnormal events!

What do I do now?

Here are some things that you can do to help you get through the next days:

- Talk! Spend time with others.
- Take a long bike ride up a steep hill.
- Listen to your favorite music:
- Sing in the shower - really loud, or take a long, warm bath.
- Hit a punching bag. Punch a pillow.
- Cry
- Structure your time with activities you enjoy doing.
- Play a favorite sport.
- Be outside in the fresh air as much as possible.
- Read your favorite book - out loud!
- Cook something for yourself that you really like. .
- Stay away from alcohol or drugs.
- Draw, color, paint.
- Jog, run, or take a long walk.
- Build something out of Legos, blocks, or with wood.
- Play a musical instrument.
- Try to get some rest, eat regular well-balanced meals even if you don't want to.
- Keep a journal, write a poem, or a letter to someone.
- Give yourself permission to do things that feel good.
- Reach out to people - parents, friends, teachers. Talking is the most healing medicine.



How Parents Can Support Their Grieving Child

1. **Say something.** Don't let the fear of not knowing what to say keep you from saying anything at all. A simple phrase, such as "I heard the news, do you want to talk about it?"
2. **Be present in the silence, too.** Though it is important to speak with your child when he or she is dealing with loss, don't rush to fill in silent moments with words. Just quietly sitting with your child through the pain can speak volumes to show much you care.
3. **Ensure basic needs are being met.** The body needs sleep and nutrients to recuperate and feel physically and emotionally well. It is common for children to not sleep or eat well after a tragedy, so ensuring that your child is eating and sleeping normally is important.
4. **Encourage your child to connect with friends as well.** Children connect and express themselves with friends differently than they do with parents. Pulling together a circle of friends can help your teen open up and express feelings that may otherwise remain unspoken.
5. **Ride the roller coaster of emotions.** It is common for children to experience a wide range of emotions following a tragedy. It is normal for children to grieve, be angry, laugh, and then grieve again.
6. **Be on the lookout for unhealthy coping patterns.** In time, your child's emotions should begin to level out. If this doesn't happen, please seek help. Trained mental health professionals can help your child process and cope with tragedy. Please let our counseling staff or administrators know if this is something you are concerned about.

