

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON STRESS REACTIONS AFTER A TRAUMA?

It is normal to have stress reactions after a traumatic event. Your emotions and behavior can change in ways that are troubling to you.

Fear or anxiety

In moments of danger, our bodies prepare to fight our enemy, flee the situation, or freeze in the hope that the danger will move past us. But those feelings of alertness may stay even after the danger has passed. You may:

- Feel tense or afraid
- Be agitated and jumpy
- Feel on alert

Sadness or depression

Sadness after a trauma may come from a sense of loss—of a loved one, of trust in the world, faith, or a previous way of life.

You may:

- Have crying spells
- Lose interest in things you used to enjoy
- Want to be alone all the time
- Feel tired, empty, and numb

Guilt and shame

You may feel guilty that you did not do more to prevent the trauma. You may feel ashamed because during the trauma you acted in ways that you would not otherwise have done. You may:

- Feel responsible for what happened
- Feel guilty because others were injured or killed and you survived

Anger and irritability

Anger may result from feeling you have been unfairly treated. Anger can make you feel irritated and cause you to be easily set off. You may:

- Lash out at your partner or spouse
- Have less patience with your children
- Overreact to small misunderstandings

Behavior changes

You may act in unhealthy ways. You may:

- Drink, use drugs, or smoke too much
- Drive aggressively
- Neglect your health
- Avoid certain people or situations

Most people will have some of these reactions at first, but they will get better at some time.

If symptoms:

- last longer than three months,
- cause you great distress, or
- disrupt your work or home life, you should seek help.

