

COMMON RESPONSES TO DISTRESSING EVENTS

Distressing events can affect people differently, but there are some common reactions that you may experience. These reactions may begin immediately, or you may feel fine for a couple of days or even weeks and then begin to notice some impacts of the event. The important thing to remember is that these reactions are normal; although you may feel some distress, you're probably experiencing a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS:

- Sleep difficulties/nightmares
- Fatigue
- Hyperactivity or "nervous energy"
- Appetite changes
- Headaches
- Pain in neck, back, or other areas
- Heart palpitations or chest pain

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS:

- Flashbacks or "reliving" the event
- Excessive jumpiness or easily startled
- Irritability, anger
- Crying, disbelief
- Feeling of sad, nervous, helpless

IMPACTS ON PRODUCTIVITY:

- Decreased concentration or focus
- Increased incidence of errors
- Lapses of memory
- Withdrawing
- Tendency to overwork

DURATION AND INTENSITY:

The duration and intensity of these reactions will usually decrease over time and disappear after a few weeks.

GETTING HELP:

If you are concerned that your reactions are lasting too long or are too intense, please take advantage of BCIT's Counselling and Student Development at 604-432-8608.

COPING SUGGESTIONS:

Whether you choose to make use of BCIT's Counselling and Student Development or not, you may find the following suggestions helpful:

- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible but don't overdo it. Cut out unnecessary tasks and activities.
- Acknowledge that you may be operating below normal level for a while.
- Structure your time more carefully than usual. Keep lists and double-check any important work.
- Maintain control where you can. Make small decisions even if you feel that they're unimportant.
- Spend time with people you trust, even though it may be difficult at first. It's easy to withdraw when you're distressed, but now is not the time to be alone.
- Give yourself time. You may feel better for a while, then go up and down for a while. This is normal. Allow plenty of time for feeling better.
- Talk with others about your feelings and reactions (e.g., friends, family, classmates, counsellors).
- Help your peers by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Take breaks, relax when you need to.
- Take care of yourself (e.g., eat regularly, sleep, exercise).

HELPING OTHERS WITH DISTRESSING EVENTS

When someone you care about, work with, or live with experiences a distressing or upsetting event, it can be difficult to know what to do.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING OTHERS:

- Reach out and be available to support others who may be affected.
- Let others talk openly about their feelings and without judgement.
- Don't offer false cheer.
- Encourage them to look after their health.
- Include them in your activities.
- Be patient. There is no formula for “getting back to normal” and the person may not “be the same” for a while.
- Don't minimize the impact of the event.
- Don't compare others' experiences with your own, present or past (e.g., “Yeah, I know what it is like ...”).
- Respect the other person's perspective. People may have different understandings and reactions to various events.
- Be aware that the person may get unexpectedly upset at times.
- Avoid speculating or commenting about what happened.
- Let your friend speak about their experiences when they feel like it.
- Be available – call, stop by to talk, share a meal or activity: Your presence and companionship are important.
- Accept your own limitations. You cannot eliminate the distress your friend is experiencing.