

FACTS ABOUT

First Responders

A guide for First Responders exposed to tragic events



Experiencing high numbers of traumatic events which are outside the range of normal experiences is not uncommon for first responders. It is also not unusual to have a stress reaction to these situations. Stress reactions are common if an incident involves death, injury or a threat to your safety. The post-trauma reactions are your psychological attempts to handle overwhelming events.

Reactions to traumatic events can include:

- Preoccupation with the traumatic event
- Anger and irritability
- Anxiety
- Unavoidable depression or grief
- Increased emotionality, feelings seem to be of greater intensity than is usual for you, or conversely, a numbing that prevents awareness of feeling
- Over-talkativeness, or isolation
- Sleep disturbances, with or without nightmares
- Survivor guilt
- Recalling of past traumatic events, as if it is replaying inches from your eyes.
- Difficulty with concentration and / or memory
- Confused thinking and difficulty making decisions

Do not be surprised if you have different reactions at different times. Having reactions in this manner allows you to avoid emotional overload. It is your body's way of coping.

While post-traumatic stress reactions are normal - how you deal with them and how they affect your life is where to watch for signs of trouble.

Dealing with Traumatic Events

- Don't isolate yourself. It may 'feel better' but it impairs healing.
- Talk openly about what happened but don't avoid emotion and just tell 'war stories'. Talking about the emotions involved will help the healing process.
- Accept the care and concern offered by others.
- Reach out to family and close friends. Let them know that you trust them and know that they care about you.
- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy and exercise - it helps recovery.
- Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs will delay recovery.
- Stay in touch with one another at work. Your co-workers can help gauge your reactions and you can help them with theirs.
- If an incident involved fatalities, consider attending the funeral or memorial service. Attend with someone you know.
- Avoid self-criticism. This is the time for healing, not the time for blame.
- Take some positive action in your own life.
- Remember, your reactions are probably normal and are likely to be shared by others. Talking about your experiences could actually help others cope with their reactions too.

WESTERN COLORADO



SUICIDE PREVENTION
FOUNDATION

Sources of Help

Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation

<http://www.suicidepreventionfoundation.org>
(970) 683-6626

US Dept. of Health & Human Services Traumatic Events & Mental Health Web Resources

<http://www.hhs.gov/disasters/emergency/mentalhealth/index.html>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org