

NORMAL REACTIONS EXPERIENCED :

EMOTIONAL EFFECTS:

SHOCK

- Disbelief at what has happened.
- Numbness. The event may seem unreal, like a dream.
- Slow comprehension of what has happened.

FEAR

- of Damage to oneself, or of death.
- of a Recurrence of the event.
- Awareness of personal vulnerability.
- Panicky irrational feelings.
- Other apparently unrelated fears.

DEPRESSION

- About the event or past events.
- Non-specific depression.
- Guilt at how one behaved.

ANGER

- At whoever caused it or “allowed it to happen”
- Outrage at what happened.
- At the injustice of it all.
- Generalised anger and irritability.

HELPLESSNESS

- Crises show us human powerlessness, as well as strength.

SADNESS

- About human destruction and loss of every kind.
- For the loss of the belief that the world is safe and predictable.

SHAME

- For having been exposed as helpless and “emotional”.
- For needing others for support.
- For not having reacted as one would have wished.

EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOUR:

The effects can be expressed in many ways and combinations:

TENSION:

- More easily startled.
- General agitation - physical and mental.

SLEEP DISTURBANCES:

- Inability to sleep.
- Thoughts that prevent sleep; replaying the incident.

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES:

- Of the incident
- Of other vivid and frightening events.

FEARFULNESS:

- Of the place, or of reminders of the incident.

IRRITABILITY:

- Frequent mood swings.

SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL:

- A need to be alone.

EFFECTS ON THOUGHT PROCESSES:

- Confusion in thinking,
- Difficulty in making decisions;
- Hard to concentrate,
- Memories lost or confused,
- Hard to focus on abstract or higher concepts,
- Flashbacks ... Attempts to shut them out may lead to deadening of feelings and thoughts.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS:

- * Tiredness
- * Headaches
- * Breathing difficulties
- * Tense muscles
- * Diarrhoea
- * Loss of appetite
- * and many other symptoms
- * Palpitations
- * Tremors
- * Nausea
- * Aches and Pains
- * Constipation
- * Loss of sexual interest

DELAYED EFFECTS:

- Any of these effects may occur after months or years of satisfactory adjustment.

These physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms are normal. They develop in people facing stress, threat or loss and are responses which help the person to adapt. They can be, however, unpleasant or distressing to those affected, and to their families. Expressing them allows nature to heal. They usually last for a short period of time and gradually diminish over the first few weeks. Different reactions may dominate as time goes by.

THE FOLLOWING HINTS MAY HELP IN THE PROCESS OF GETTING BACK TO NORMAL:

FOR YOURSELF : (SELF CARE)

- Contact friends.
- Have someone stay with you for at least some part of the day.
- Don't try to fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks. They are normal; they will decrease over time and be less painful.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as you can manage. Restore your full schedule as soon as possible.
- Eat well balanced and regular meals.
- Try to keep a reasonable level of normal activity.
- Fight against boredom.
- Try to rest a bit more; yet at the same time physical activity is often helpful.
- Talk to people who love you.
- Express your feelings as they arise.
- Talk to your counsellor if feelings prolong.

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS:

- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.
- Listen carefully.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Spend some time with the affected person; yet give them some private time also.
- Perhaps help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children. (But just for a while, and don't take all tasks away from them, as doing what they can manage is part of getting back to normality.)
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't rebuke them for the feelings they express.
- Don't say that you understand exactly how they are feeling when it is obvious you have not been through a similar experience. If you have experienced a similar trauma allude to it, maybe, if that helps them to accept your support, but don't take over by telling your story. This is their painful experience and nobody has been down exactly the same road. There is also the risk that they will feel guilty about their sad feelings; after all, you came through all right, so what right have they "to feel sorry for themselves"? They have every right to whatever feelings they have at the moment. At the right time, however, the fact that you survived something similar could give them encouragement.

- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse." That is unhelpful. Instead tell them that you are sorry such an event occurred and you want to understand and assist them.
- If the symptoms described above are severe, or if they last longer than six weeks, the affected person may need professional counselling.

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS:

Children react to frightening events in many different ways. There is no typical or "normal" reaction. When children learn that a parent or close family member or close friend has been involved in an accident or has died, it is difficult for them to understand what has happened, or why it happened. Like adults they will have strong feelings. Unlike adults, they cannot always tell you how they are feeling, but express their emotions through their behaviour.

Common reactions in young children include increased fearfulness, a return to "babyish" behaviour, nightmares and sleep disturbances or bed wetting. They may also develop aches or pains, or misbehave in uncharacteristic ways. Delayed reactions are also common.

Like adults most children's reactions diminish over time. Parents and adults can help the process by reassuring them that they are safe and will be cared for, and by listening and talking to them about the experience. Honest answers are best as the unknown is often more frightening than reality for children. Some children may need extra encouragement, or special attention, particularly at bedtime.

AFTER A STRESSFUL INCIDENT

For Further Information
Bealey Centre (03) 3656312
Email: info@bealeycentre.co.nz
Website: <http://www.bealeycentre.co.nz>

HELPING YOU COPE WITH TRAUMA AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS

If you have been affected by an abnormal event, the incident will have a very real presence in your life. Those direction involved, their families, their co-workers, the community in general will be affected in some way.

Increased stress may interfere with your day to day life. The experience also may have left you shaken; worried about the future. "Getting back to normal" can be a difficult process after a personal experience of this kind.

COMMON REACTION TO TRAUMA

Learning to recognise the normal reactions and emotions that occur following an abnormal event can help us to understand and feel more at ease with those feelings. This in turn can help us in adjusting to what happened. Each person's experience is a unique personal event. Past experiences, individual perceptions, all contribute to differing behaviours. However, we can list some reactions that commonly appear amongst people caught up in an abnormal event. It is reassuring to know that others react in similar situations, even though they may not react exactly as we do. Remember: Your response has been a normal reaction to an abnormal event. You are normal! It is the experience that was over the top!

Over.....