

## COPING STRATEGIES

It is important during times of stress to take steps to renew and care for yourself. Healing and recovering from the emotional effects of the event will take time.

- Allow yourself to feel emotions such as sadness, anger or grief over what has happened
- Try to keep your personal routines/ habits in place such as regular mealtimes. This will help you feel as though your life has a sense of order
- Upsetting times can cause people to drink alcohol or to use drugs in a way that causes other problems. Try to cope with your stresses without increasing your substance use, alcohol and drugs won't help in the long run.
- Healthy practices such as eating well, exercising and getting enough sleep especially important in times of high stress
- In difficult times you may find your emotions at a higher level. Try to be understanding and forgiving of yourself and others
- Don't let yourself become isolated. Maintain connections with your friends, relatives, neighbours, co-workers, or members of your religious community. If possible, talk about your experiences with them
- Commit to something personally meaningful and important every day.
- Write about your experiences for yourself or to share with others

## Campus Resources

**Student Counselling & Development**  
416-736-5297

**The Centre**  
416-736-5211

**Sexual Assault Survivors' Support Line**  
416-650-8056

## Community Resources

**Assaulted Women's Helpline**  
416-863-0511

**Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic**  
416-323-9149

**Black Creek Community Health Centre**  
416-249-8000

**The Gatehouse**  
416-255-5900

**Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/  
Domestic Violence Treatment Centres**  
(416) 323-7327

**Toronto Rape Crisis Centre**  
416-597-8808

**Violence Against Women- Family Service  
Toronto**  
416-595-9618

**Women's College Hospital Trauma Therapy  
Program**  
416-323-6230

**The 519**  
416) 392-6874

# COMMON STRESS REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

An information brochure prepared for the York University community by:

**Student Counselling & Development  
Division of Students  
York University**



## COMMON STRESS REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Some reactions are common to people who experience traumatic stress as a result of witnessing or being involved in a traumatic event. Everyone who is exposed to such an event is affected by it and may experience some reaction. Being part of a traumatic incident reminds us that everyone is vulnerable to tragedy. Our protective belief that "nothing could happen to me or to people I know" can be momentarily stripped away.

During the event and in the first 24 hours after it, you may experience some initial shock reactions that represent a wide variety of emotions from feeling anger or fear to being numb or detached from your feelings. You might feel somewhat disoriented or cut off from the environment around you. You may also experience several physical shock reactions and disturbances.

In the days following the event, you may continue to experience a variety of cognitive or emotional, physical, and behavioral reactions that may vary in intensity and duration. Although they can be upsetting, it is important to remember that these are normal reactions to a frightening and "abnormal" situation. These reactions are likely to become less frequent and eventually disappear within the weeks ahead. If you continue to be concerned, you may want to seek professional assistance.

## POSSIBLE COGNITIVE/ EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

- Recurring dreams or nightmares about the event
- Reconstructing the event in your mind, in an effort to construct a different outcome
- Feelings of confusion or impaired judgment
- Trouble concentrating or remembering
- Experiencing a sense of powerlessness
- Questioning your spiritual or religious beliefs
- Repeated thoughts or memories of the event which are hard to stop
- Feeling numb, withdrawn or disconnected
- Experiencing fear and anxiety when things remind you of the event
- Feeling a lack of involvement in everyday activities
- Feeling depressed, sad, or down
- Feeling bursts of anger, rage or intense irritability
- Experiencing a sense of injustice
- Feeling a sense of emptiness or hopelessness

*"Healing takes courage,  
and we all have courage,  
even if we have to dig a  
little to find it."*

*- Tori Amos*

## POSSIBLE PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Perspiration
- Tremors
- Gastro-intestinal problems (e.g. nausea, constipation, diarrhea)
- Allergies, skin rashes
- Headaches, backaches, stomachaches
- Vascular, cardio-vascular and muscular problems
- Fluctuations in blood pressure

## POSSIBLE BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS

- Being overprotective of your safety
- Isolating yourself from others
- Increased consumption of drugs/ alcohol
- Becoming very alert, startling easily
- Change in eating patterns/ sexual interest
- Problems getting to sleep, staying asleep, or sleeping more than usual
- Avoiding places, people, or activities that remind you of the event
- Increased conflict with other people
- Keeping excessively busy
- Uncontrollable crying or laughing
- Any behaviour that for you is atypical

