Anyone involved with a disaster or frightening event may experience trauma reactions. You might experience these reactions after any of the following:

- You witnessed or were involved in the event.
- You arrived upon the scene of the event.
- You had a “near miss” or were almost involved in the event.
- You knew or know others who were killed, harmed, or involved in some way.
- You have a relationship with family or friends of victims.
- You have heard a lot about the event through media or friends.
- You are reminded of other traumatic incidents in your life by this event.

Trauma reactions are normal responses to extremely abnormal events. You can’t predict what type of trauma reactions you will experience after a disaster. It is important to allow yourself permission to have your responses and take care of them, both by yourself and by asking for help from others.

**Typical Reactions to Trauma**

Not everyone experiences the same set of responses to trauma. Here are some reactions you might notice.

**Psychological**
- Self-blame for escaping the tragedy
- Alertness for possible danger even in normally safe activities
- Reliving of the traumatic event:
  - thoughts or images you can't control
  - disturbing dreams or nightmares
  - flashbacks about the event
  - distress when exposed to events that remind you of the trauma

**Emotional**
- Anxiety or fear even long after the event
- Irritability, restlessness, or overexcitement
- Sadness or moodiness; crying more than usual
- Helpless or hopeless feelings
- Numb or detached emotions
- Feelings of isolation from others

**Cognitive**
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion or distraction
- Slower thinking than usual

**Physical**
- Headaches
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Tendency to startle easily at loud noises
- Fatigue or feeling slowed down

**Behavioral**
- Changes in activity levels, higher or lower
- More irritable behavior than usual
- Withdrawal, social isolation
- Avoidance of activities or places that remind you of the traumatic event
- Trouble sleeping
- Strong need to talk about the event or read accounts about the event

If you notice that you are having some of these reactions, remember your response is normal. Right after a traumatic event, you will probably feel shaken, dazed, and somewhat confused. You will notice you are not behaving as you usually would. It is important to take care of yourself as best you can. Some self-care suggestions are on the next page.
Take Care of Yourself

You're Okay

• Keep reminding yourself that you’re having a normal response to a stressful situation.
• Give yourself permission to do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. Your body and mind will tell you what you need to do.
• Get plenty of rest when you're tired. Don't force yourself to be active if you don't have the energy.

Talk It Out

• Talk to people as much as you need to. Reach out.
• You may feel a need to talk about the trauma over and over again. If someone is willing to listen, talk to her or him about how you are feeling. If you feel there is no one you can talk to, consider calling a crisis line, going to a crisis center, or using other community resources—they are there to help you.
• Allow yourself to cry, rage, and express your feelings when you need to. Try not to numb your feelings with alcohol or drugs. This will only make things harder.
• Spend time with others, even if you don't feel like talking. It can be very comforting to know you're not alone. Try to find someone or someplace that feels safe and comforting to you, and spend time there.

Take It Easy

• Do things that feel good to you—take baths, read, exercise, watch television, spend time with friends and family, fix yourself a special treat—whatever feels right.
• Try not to make any major life decisions or big life changes right now. This is not a time to put pressure on yourself to do anything out of the ordinary. Concentrate on taking care of yourself.

The Process of Recovery

Recovering from a trauma may take a long time. The first response of feeling shaken (perhaps also numbness) may last days, weeks, or longer. Don't be surprised if these reactions last longer than you expected. It is impossible to know how long they will go on, but usually trauma reactions go away over time. If another stressful event happens while you are still recovering, you may find that your trauma reactions reappear for a while. This is perfectly normal.

When to Call for Help

At any time during trauma recovery, help from a counselor or mental health professional could be useful. You should definitely get professional help right away if any of the following things happen:

• You think about killing yourself.
• You cannot carry out your normal life tasks.
• Your fears keep you from returning to places or situations that remind you of the trauma.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please dial 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You will be routed to the closest crisis center in your area.

Adapted from “Taking Care of Yourself after a Traumatic Event” by the University Counseling Center, University of Iowa