

# Understanding Traumatic Events

You have experienced a traumatic event. It could be an accident or injury or the loss of a loved one or property. You may have witnessed a terrifying event or been threatened. A traumatic event could be any serious or endangering "out of the ordinary" happening. Even though the event may be completed, you may now be experiencing or may experience later some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular traumatic event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Here are some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction in a traumatized person:

## Physical

Nausea  
Upset stomach  
Tremors (lips, hands)  
Feeling uncoordinated  
Profuse sweating  
Chills  
Diarrhea  
Dizziness  
Chest pain (should be checked at hospital)  
Rapid heart beat  
Rapid breathing  
Increased blood pressure  
Headaches  
Sleep disturbance  
Startled  
Muscle aches

## Thinking

Slowed thinking  
Difficulty making decisions  
Difficulty in problem-solving  
Confusion  
Disorientation (especially to place and time)  
Difficulty calculating  
Difficulty concentration  
Memory problems  
Difficulty naming common objects  
Seeing the event over and over  
Distressing dreams  
Poor attention span

## Emotional

Anxiety  
Fear  
Guilt  
Grief  
Depression  
Sadness  
Feeling lost  
Feeling abandoned  
Feeling irritable  
Worry about others  
Wanting to hide  
Wanting to limit contact with others  
Anger  
Feeling numb  
Shock