

Understanding Common Responses to Trauma

Common reactions to a traumatic event can vary widely, but they often include the following responses. Additionally, pre-existing conditions may reemerge and increase in severity. These are normal responses to an abnormal and deeply distressing event.

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BROWN

Emotional

- Shock, disbelief, or numbness
- Intense sadness, despair or grief
- Fear, anxiety, or panic
- Anger or irritability
- Guilt (for surviving or not being able to help others)
- Emotional exhaustion/reduced psychological stamina
- Hopelessness or helplessness

Physical

- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares
- Rapid heartbeat or shortness of breath
- Headaches, stomachaches, or muscle tension
- Startled responses to loud noises or sudden movements

Cognitive

- Intrusive memories or flashbacks
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Confusion or disorientation
- Replaying the event in one's mind
- Distrust or hypervigilance

Behavioral

- Withdrawal from others
- Avoidance of reminders of the event
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Seeking constant reassurance or safety

CAPS is available on demand 24/7 and 365 days/year to support students experiencing a mental health crisis.