

Common Reactions to Trauma

Each person who experiences traumatic events responds to trauma differently. In fact, no two people will process any traumatic event in the same way. Responses to trauma can be immediate or delayed (days, months, or years). While there are individual differences to survivors' experiences of trauma, there are common patterns that are normative.

The following is a list of reactions to trauma. It is not a comprehensive list but rather a sampling of common post-trauma symptoms. Survivors may experience some or many reactions listed below:

Physical Reactions

- fatigue
- gastrointestinal irritability
- nightmares ▶
- headaches
- changes in eating patterns
- physical injuries ▶
- soreness
- stress related depression
- immune system responses
- unwanted pregnancy ▶
- sexually transmitted diseases ▶
- changes in sleeping patterns
- substance abuse ▶

Social Reactions

- difficulty getting things accomplished
- fear/nervousness in crowds
- withdrawal from people and activities ▶
- hypersensitivity
- need for revenge
- fear of being alone ▶
- difficulty with intimacy
- loss of trust in self and/or others
- difficulty/apprehension around persons with similar attributes to the perpetrator ▶

Emotional Reactions

- anxiety
- betrayal
- anger
- guilt, blame
- sense of disbelief
- confusion
- trouble concentrating
- flashbacks
- embarrassment, feeling exposed
- new fears
- helplessness
- hopelessness, suicidal ideations ▶
- irritable or having outbursts of anger
- depression, sadness ▶
- numb

You may question:

- If I forget about it, it will go away...?
- What if I hadn't done...?
- It was my fault because...
- Why me?
- What will people think?
- Will they blame me? Will they reject me?

▶ These reactions range from less to more severe. You should seek help if you are experiencing any of the reactions associated with these flags.