

## Emotional Response to Crisis

Our daily lives have a certain rhythm or balance. Emotional balance involves everyday stress, both positive and negative. We have good times like a wonderful dinner with family and bad times like an awful day at work or school. But for the most part, we stay in a familiar range of equilibrium or balance.

When things happen to us that are not part of what we see as normal, we can be in a state of crisis. However, learning of unexpected and often overwhelming news, such as that of a national disaster, school shooting, the death of a peer serve as perfect examples of such a traumatic events that can throw us off our rhythm. It can be difficult to make sense of such profound tragedies.

It is easy to be traumatized by a catastrophic event. No one is ever prepared, and for the most part, it is unexpected. Given this event, we may have a crisis reaction. This is normal even though it may not seem so. There are many reactions to a crisis, which can be grouped into four main categories:

<b>COGNITIVE</b>	<b>PHYSICAL</b>	<b>EMOTIONAL</b>	<b>BEHAVIORAL</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion in thinking</li> <li>• Difficulty making decisions</li> <li>• Loss of attention span</li> <li>• Lowered concentration</li> <li>• Problems with abstract thinking</li> <li>• Calculation problems</li> <li>• Memory dysfunction</li> <li>• Lowering of all higher cognitive functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Excessive sweating</li> <li>• Chills</li> <li>• Dizzy spells</li> <li>• Light headedness</li> <li>• Globus hystericus</li> <li>• Thirst</li> <li>• Hunger</li> <li>• Increased heart rate</li> <li>• Elevated blood pressure</li> <li>• Rapid breathing</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Difficulty breathing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Emotional shock</li> <li>• Emotional numbness</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Grief</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>• Heightened anxiety</li> <li>• Panic feelings</li> <li>• Loss of emotional control</li> <li>• Fear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in ordinary behavior patterns</li> <li>• Changes in eating</li> <li>• Decreases personal hygiene</li> <li>• Increased or decreased association with fellow workers</li> <li>• Withdrawal from others</li> <li>• Loss of interest in work</li> <li>• Prolonged silences</li> </ul>

## How to Cope with Crisis Reactions

- Periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time: keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself "crazy".
- Talk to people – talking is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol; you don't need to complicate this with substance misuse.
- Reach out to people care, and spend time with others.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are also under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible in order to will give yourself feelings of control over your life (i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them even if you're not sure).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal. Don't try to fight them. They'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

## For Family Members & Friends

- Listen carefully and don't feel the need to give advice.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" – traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.