



Common signs of stress after a difficult event

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

You might find that even after a tough situation ends, it may still affect you. Some people have reactions shortly after the event, some days later, and some not at all.

These reactions can fade more quickly with support from family and friends. You can also talk to a counselor, mental health professional or your doctor. He or she can help you understand why you're feeling this way and what you can do about it. It helps if you continue with good habits such as exercise, rest and a healthy diet.

You can read some of the more common reactions below:

Physical — Be sure to check with your doctor right away

- Change in appetite
- Chest pain (should be checked at a hospital)
- Chills
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Fatigue
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Headaches
- Increased blood pressure
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Muscle aches/tremors
- Nausea/vomiting
- Profuse sweating
- Rapid breathing/heart rate
- Teeth clenching
- Thirsty

Mental

- Self-blame and guilt
- Blaming others or “finger-pointing”
- Changes in attitude
- Difficulty making decisions
- Poor focus
- Difficulty solving problems
- Disbelief
- Confusion about place and time
- Disturbed thinking
- Heightened/ lowered alertness
- Continuous images of the event
- Memory problems
- Nightmares
- Questioning your skills
- Flashbacks
- Slowed thinking
- Trouble naming common objects

Emotional

- Anger/irritability
- Anxiety/agitation
- Depression
- Desire to hide
- Increase in worry about others
- Fear of losing emotional control
- Fear/apprehension
- Feeling helpless or not in control
- Feeling lost or abandoned
- Feeling shocked or numb
- Grief and sadness
- No longer having fun
- Overly sensitive to people
- Panic
- Blaming self or thinking, “Why not me?”
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of trust

Behavioral

- Aggressive/hostile behavior
- Change in activities
- Changes in speech
- Changes in sexual interest
- Emotional outbursts
- Erratic or impulsive behavior
- Always on the alert
- More accidents
- Isolation
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Over or under communication
- Over- or under-reacting
- Inability to sit down or relax
- Suspiciousness
- Change in self-care
- Withdrawal from others
- Eating too much or too little

Spiritual

- Loss of purpose or meaning
- Questioning one’s basic beliefs
- Sense of being in it alone
- Withdrawal from place of worship
- Change in spiritual and/or religious involvement
- Familiar faith practices seem empty
- Questioning whether anyone cares about you
- Believing that we have failed as human beings
- Loss of direction and/or a personal compass
- Loss of faith
- Loss of future direction
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling helpless
- Search for meaning
- High levels of shame or guilt

If you’re concerned about your reactions, or they last longer than three weeks, we’re here to help.

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