



Traumatic incidents in the workplace: A guide for employees

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

Stress reactions are a normal coping response to dealing with an acutely upsetting event. This is especially true if there was a death, injury or direct threat to your safety. These post-traumatic reactions, as they are called, are your mind's attempt to cope with the event.

Whether you were directly or indirectly impacted, you may feel emotional or psychological shock much like the way your body goes into shock after a physical injury.

Common reactions

- Constant focus on the traumatic event
- Anger and irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression or grief
- Increased emotionality, feelings seem to be of a greater intensity than usual; or, a numbing of feelings
- Talking too much or not at all
- Sleep disturbance, with or without nightmares
- Survivor guilt
- Recall of past traumatic events or grief
- Difficulty with concentration and/or memory
- Difficulty making decisions and confused thinking

Don't be surprised if you have one reaction and then it changes to another. Having reactions in this manner may help you avoid overload.

What can you do?

You can deal with these reactions to reduce the impact and disruption they have on your life. In fact, if you don't deal with them, they may last longer. Some coping skills may be more helpful than others. Try some of the following:

- **Don't go it alone.** After the event, getting some time alone may help reduce the feeling of threat or stress. Later, it's better to talk with others and gather support.
- **Talk out what happened and how you feel about it.** Telling what happened while ducking your feelings leaves you with just telling "war stories." When you name and express your feelings, the bad feelings become easier to bear.
- **Accept the concern and care of others.** Reach out to family, close friends and those you trust.
- **Practice healthy living.** Enjoy health food and drinks. The stress will only last longer if you turn to alcohol or drugs to get yourself through it. Exercise to give yourself energy and clear your mind.
- **Acknowledge support among those you work with.** Think about the comfort or help you've received from each other. Ask how coworkers are doing. Talk about how this has affected work.
- **Avoid self-criticism.** This is a time for healing, not blaming. Plan to do something positive in your life.
- **Remember that most reactions are normal** and are likely shared by others. They remind you that you care.

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