H&C HEALTH & COUNSELING

Counseling Services
health.geneseo.edu

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THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Remember, trauma and stress responses are *normal* reactions to abnormal situations. It is important to allow yourself and others permission to have your reactions (whatever they may be), to take care of yourself, and to ask for help (when needed) as best as you can.

Please keep in mind that each person reacts to trauma in a different manner and these reactions may change over time. However, some typical responses may include the following:

- Having feelings of shock, disbelief, anger, and/or sadness. Immediately after a learning about a tragedy, many people may feel numb or feel like such an event can't quite be real. Alternatively, some people are eager to discuss their emotional reactions with family, friends, or colleagues.
- Speculating about what happened and seeking more information. For national tragedies, this may mean listening to or watching the news, checking the web for updates, etc., or, for personal tragedies, it can involve talking to others about what you each know or have heard.
- Wanting to check in with loved ones, even if they are not involved in the tragedy and are not in any immediate danger. It is normal to want to touch base with someone you care about.

Common reactions may also fall into the following categories:

<u>Physiological and Emotional</u>

- Feelings of sadness, moodiness, more crying than usual
- Feelings of numbness or detachment
- Heightened anxiety or fear such as fears about the death of others, anxiety about future without the one who died, fears of being alone, and excessive fear that something will happen to you or others
- Irritability, restlessness, over excitability
- Hypervigilance—increased feelings of cautiousness and wariness about your surroundings
- "Survivor guilt" or feelings of self-blame that you're alive
- Mood swings, including sudden changes in mood or intense reactions in response to minor triggers

<u>Cognitive</u>

- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling confused, disoriented, and/or distracted
- Difficulty making decisions that normally would be easy
- Ruminating, especially about death and dying

<u>Physical</u>

- Headaches or other muscle aches
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Exaggerated startle response—e.g., having an extreme fear reaction to a loud noise
- Fatigue, feeling slowed down

<u>Behavioral</u>

- Hyperactivity or less activity than usual
- Withdrawal, social isolation
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia and other sleep problems (e.g., inability to fall asleep or stay asleep, frequent wakening)

Most reactions decrease over time; getting back into your usual routines can be helpful (for more, see go.geneseo.edu/selfcare). When symptoms persist, talking to a professional can be helpful. Call Counseling Services at 585-245-5716 if you wish to make an appointment to discuss your experience.