

A Practical Guide to Coping

Common Reactions

Feeling stressed after a sudden, unexpected event is normal. Stress only becomes a problem when it overwhelms one's ability to cope and interferes with taking care of our daily responsibilities. Coping with stress begins with recognizing our reactions and then taking steps to manage them in a healthy way. The reactions below are some of the common reactions to a sudden, unexpected event.

Physical Reactions

- > Shock
- > Fatigue
- > Nausea
- > Insomnia
- > Dizziness
- > Headaches
- > Loss of appetite
- > Rapid heart rate

Behavioral Reactions

- > Agitation
- > Social isolation
- > Emotional outbursts
- > Impaired sleep pattern
- > Impaired work performance
- > Increased or decreased appetite
- > Increase in alcohol consumption
- > Increased interpersonal conflicts
- > Decreased interest in daily activities

Emotional Reactions

- > Fear
- > Guilt
- > Anger
- > Denial
- > Anxiety
- > Sadness
- > Irritability
- > Depression
- > Self-blame
- > Apprehension

Cognitive Reactions

- > Confusion
- > Hyper-vigilance
- > Memory problems
- > Lack of concentration
- > Poor decision making
- > Poor problem solving
- > Intrusive thoughts and images

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Ways of Coping

Feeling better may take time after a sudden, unexpected event. The healthy activities below will help you cope with the reactions you may be experiencing.

- > **Follow your daily routine.** Wake up, go to bed and eat meals at your usual times. Continue to go to work and engage in activities with friends and family to maintain a feeling of control over your life.
- > **Give yourself permission to feel.** Feeling sad, confused, angry, scared or worried is normal. Express your feelings as they arise.
- > **Talk to someone you trust.** Talk with a family member or close friend about your experience and your feelings. Accepting help from others is a healthy way to cope.
- > **Take care of yourself.** Get enough rest and eat regularly. Engage in physical activities – even a short walk will increase your energy level.
- > **Make daily decisions.** Making even small decisions will give you a sense of control. If a problem is beyond your control, accept it and move on.
- > **Practice relaxation.** Make activities that you find relaxing part of your daily routine. Close your eyes and visualize a peaceful scene while breathing slowly and deeply. This can temporarily remove you from a stressful situation.
- > **Create a comfortable environment.** Surround yourself at home and work with things that you enjoy. Listen to music that helps you feel relaxed.
- > **Take one thing at a time.** For people under stress, any ordinary workload may seem overwhelming. Do not multi task. Perform one task at a time until the project is completed.
- > **Allow extra time.** Normal activities may seem more difficult and take longer than usual to complete. Allow yourself extra time and do the best you can.
- > **Take a break.** Reading a favorite book or watching a favorite movie will allow you the time you need to look at the event from a different perspective.

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Do's and Don'ts

People who experience a sudden, unexpected event may demonstrate changes in behavior. It is important to manage your stress in a healthy way. The “do's” and “don'ts” below will help you cope and reduce the probability of long term reactions.

Do's

- > Get enough rest
- > Maintain a regular diet
- > Follow a familiar routine
- > Accept help from others
- > Take one thing at a time
- > Reach out to help others
- > Maintain an exercise regimen
- > Expect the event to upset you
- > Talk to others about the event
- > Spend time with family/friends

Don'ts

- > Don't stay away from work
- > Don't withdraw from others
- > Don't take on new projects
- > Don't look for easy answers
- > Don't increase caffeine intake
- > Don't reduce leisure activities
- > Don't make major life changes
- > Don't have unrealistic expectations
- > Don't drink alcohol excessively or use drugs

Following these suggestions will help you cope and reduce your stress. In fact, coping with a traumatic event in a healthy way will increase your resilience and prepare you for life's next challenge. If your reactions persist, contact your EAP to speak with a counselor who will assist you with getting additional help.