

COPING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND NEWS



As details about tragedies unfold, it is normal to have a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions. If you have experienced past traumas, you may be experiencing memories and feelings from those events and have increased symptoms now. For very public traumas, even those who have not been directly experienced the crisis may be affected.

COMMON REACTIONS

Please recognize that experiencing any of these can be normal reactions and that, with time, there is a natural healing process which occurs. Over the next few days or weeks you may experience periods of:

- Shock, numbness
- Confusion
- Moodiness and irritability
- Anxiety, worrying, panic
- Jumpiness, hyper-vigilance
- Guilt
- Feelings of helplessness
- Sadness, depression
- Fatigue
- Disturbing images or memories
- Nausea, headaches
- Feeling vulnerable or unsafe
- Social withdraw
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Anger and blame of others
- Numbness or feeling like you are not reacting

Shifts in priorities, worldview and appreciation of others can also occur — some people experience positive changes despite their initial pain and grief.

MORE RESOURCES

Stress reactions usually diminish in severity over time. However, if your symptoms persist, cause you excessive discomfort, or increase over time you may want to seek out mental health resources.

STUDENTS

All students have access to a wide variety of mental health resources at uhs.berkeley.edu/mentalhealth. Students can also access support by talking to a counselor by calling (510) 642-9494 or booking an appointment on eTang. For after-hours support or when UHS is closed students can call by the 24/7 counseling line at (855) 817-5667.

FACULTY & STAFF

Be Well at Work Employee Assistance is available for confidential support. Telephone consultations and appointments can be made by calling (510) 643-7754 or by sending an e-mail to employeeassistance@berkeley.edu.



REASONS FOR FEELING TROUBLED DURING AND AFTER AN EVENT

The death of a loved one

Traumatic events often include injury and death. You may have known someone who died during a tragic event or this event may remind you of other deaths or losses. Even the death of a pet can be traumatic. Symptoms of grief and loss are similar to the post-trauma symptoms listed above, and many of the coping strategies listed below can help for grief as well.

Traumatized children

Children who have experienced a trauma first or second-hand need special attention. Children's symptoms may include excessive fears, unwillingness to go to school, nightmares, and increases in regressive behaviors such as bedwetting and thumb sucking. Give your child an opportunity to ask questions, and respond in age-appropriate ways. Remember that your child may hear others talk about the trauma, and that without clear information, they can gain a distorted view of the crisis. Reassure your child by increasing

physical contact, keeping in touch, and making plans to do things together.

Post-trauma at the workplace

After a traumatic event, your colleagues and co-workers may also experience some of the reactions listed above. Worksite group meetings to discuss individual experiences and plans for the future can be very helpful. Remember that each person can experience trauma differently. By extending patience and understanding you can support yourself and others in readjusting to life after a crisis.

The effects of cumulative trauma

Psychologically, we connect traumas. If you experience a new trauma before you've had enough time to heal from previous trauma, you may experience the separate events as related. This can lead to intensified symptoms and prolonged recovery time. As a result of multiple traumatic incidents, you may experience a greater sense

of disconnectedness from yourself, others, and your work. Seek out support from a friend or counselor to help restore your sense of order and control.

Fear of your own safety

Tragedies that occur may create additional feelings of fear for your own safety on campus. This feeling is normal, yet it also gives us an opportunity to strengthen our community. There are some actions you can take to feel more in control of your safety and environment: pay attention to your own surroundings; talk with other students; seek counseling for yourself or group counseling for your living communities; speak up if you feel someone around you needs help - whether that means seeking counseling or calling the campus police; and review the Safety Counts campus police publication.

COPING WITH THESE REACTIONS

People can take steps to help themselves, family members and each other cope with stress reactions.

Experience your thoughts and feelings

You have the right to have thoughts and feelings even if you were not directly affected. Remind yourself that you are normal and having normal reactions.

Talk about your thoughts and feelings

Even when the trauma is something that is being talked about publicly, it is important to talk to others about how you are affected. Talk to someone who feels safe to you.

Take time

Be good to yourself—spend time with people you care about and do things that make you feel better. Take breaks, schedule pleasant activities, engage in positive distracting activities such as

sports, hobbies and reading.

Remember

Remember each person experiences trauma differently and that you and others may have different needs at different times, try to be flexible. Remember that when under stress you may not react in a manner you would normally expect.

Moderate your news

If the trauma is widely publicized, be mindful of how the media reports affect you. While having information is helpful for some crisis, some people may want to limit how much they read, listen to or watch the news.

School and work

If you are having trouble concentrating in class or work talk to your professors

or boss about how to handle your workload and still give yourself time to recover.

Take action

While you do not want to make big life changes in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event, find ways to express your thoughts and feelings about the trauma. Suggestions include political action, community service and spiritual/religious practice to name a few.

Seek support

Seek support from campus and community resources. Consult a mental health professional if you need assistance or want to gauge your reactions.