Riverside Trauma Center

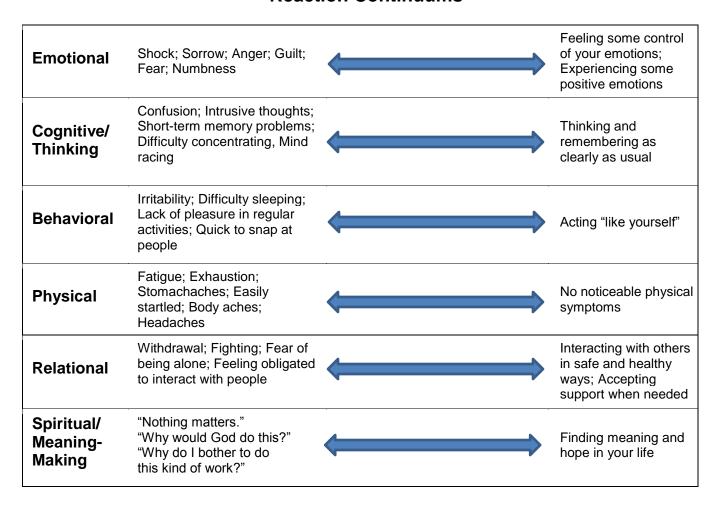
Reactions to Highly Stressful or Potentially Traumatic Events

After a loss or other highly stressful or potentially traumatic event people usually experience a wide range of reactions. These reactions generally fall into six domains (outlined below). For many people, reactions in the immediate aftermath of an event change and shift rapidly. All of these reactions are normal and to be expected.

It may be helpful to have a sense of where you fall on each continuum of types of reaction, keeping in mind that this can change and shift (in either direction) at any time. For most people, over time, reactions tend to move towards the right end of the continuums.

At the same time, there are things that people can do to take care of themselves in each domain which can help to ease some of the reactions that might be causing them continued distress (see other side for some suggestions).

Reaction Continuums





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Strategies for Coping

While people experience a range of reactions to a greater or lesser degree after a highly stressful or potentially traumatic experience, generally most people are resilient and are okay after a while. It takes time to recover, however, most people find ways of integrating their experiences into their lives as they move forward. This is an incredibly personal process, but there are some things that many survivors of potentially traumatic events have found helpful.

Emotional	 Allow yourself to experience what you feel (cry, shake, breathe deeply, etc.) Label what you are experiencing Find a partner to vent to Practice moderation 	 Be assertive when needed Engage in activities that enhance positive emotions Use and enjoy positive humor Add your own:
Cognitive/ Thinking	 Write things down Make small, daily decisions Review previous successful problem-solving Remember you have choices 	 Focus on being flexible Use problem-solving skills Engage in downward comparisons Add your own:
Behavioral	 Do activities that were previously enjoyable Set goals, have a plan Get involved with others in working for a justice that restores Ask others how they think you are doing 	 Restore or develop safe routines Plan ahead and prepare for possible high-risk situations Avoid avoidance Add your own:
Physical	 Drink water and minimize caffeine Engage in physical activity (dance, run, yoga, etc) Practice relaxation exercises Listen to and take care of your body 	 Get good, uninterrupted sleep Avoid high-risk, dangerous sensation-seeking behaviors Add your own:
Relational	 Make plans with people who feel supportive (consider, at least temporarily, limiting time with those who do not) Give back and help others Talk to others who have survived similar experiences 	 Balance time spent with others with time for yourself Lean on others, accept help Use community resources such as websites, telephone hotlines, etc. Add your own:
Spiritual/ Meaning- Making	 Sing, paint, write poetry, journal, etc. Read stories of other survivors who overcame hard times Use faith to rekindle a sense of hope in yourself and others Ask the hard questions boldly 	 Seek inspiration, guidance, and comfort from prayer, meditation, etc. Talk to your clergy or other religious leaders Forgive others and forgive yourself Add your own:

Adapted from Meichenbaum (2012), and Yoder (2002)

For the majority of people, their reactions change over time (even if they come around to the same reactions again and again). However, some people feel that they are just stuck. If nothing is changing, it may be helpful to reach out to someone such as a counselor or clergy member for additional support.



