USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

STAFF CARE PROGRAM
Connect. Strengthen. Thrive.

# COMMON REACTIONS AFTER A TRAUMA OR CRITICAL INCIDENT

After a traumatic event or critical incident, most of us will experience intense feelings and reactions. Sometimes this happens immediately after the event. Sometimes we may experience these reactions after a brief or extended delay. . Not every person experiences the same reactions. However, you are likely to bounce back and forth between periods during which you relive the trauma and other periods during which you do not have much feeling and avoid any thought or reminder of the event. ***This is entirely normal.***

**You may have some common reactions after a traumatic event or critical incident:**

- Feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, sad
- Feeling numb, unable to experience love or joy
- Avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
- Being irritable or outbursts of anger
- Becoming easily upset or agitated

**Some reactions may be physical:**

- Stomach upset, trouble eating
- Trouble sleeping & exhaustion
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing
- Severe headache if thinking of the event, sweating
- Excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, food
- Worsening of chronic medical problems

**Some reactions may be emotional:**

- Feeling hopeless about the future & detached or unconcerned about others
- Having trouble concentrating
- Jumpy & startle easily at sudden noise
- On guard and constantly alert
- Having disturbing dreams/memories
- Feeling like the event is happening all over again
- Withdrawing from family and friends

## WHAT HELPS

- Talking to another person for support
- Spending time with others
- Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk)
- Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
- Participating in a support group
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule
- Exercising in moderation
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Keeping a journal
- Taking breaks

- Seeking counseling

**WHAT DOESN'T HELP**

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Working too much
- Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Anger or violence
- Not taking care of yourself
- Overeating or failing to eat
- Doing risky things
- Excessive TV or computer games
- Withdrawing from pleasant activities
- Blaming other