

COMMON REACTIONS AFTER A MAJOR EVENT

MENTAL WELLBEING FACT SHEET 1

January 2020

Regrettably, we live in times of increasing turbulence...every day around the world there are events that have significant human impact. Increasingly local and global events will impact people everywhere – accidents, weather extremes, natural disasters, civil unrest, acts of terrorism, corporate takeovers, political events and changing financial markets. People are sometimes surprised at how much a major event or trauma can affect us in our everyday life, even when we have not been directly impacted.

Acute stress reactions

Most early stress reactions gradually fade, although initial reactions can be very strong. It is normal to feel distressed, think a lot about the event, feel tense or irritable, and feel numb or cut-off from others. You may want to stay away from where the incident happened, avoid thinking about it, get upset when you are reminded about it, and wish you could block memories and images out of your mind. These reactions are common and are part of the natural healing process.

Coping skills

- › Talk with family and friends about your experience.
- › Allow yourself time on your own to think.
- › Express your worries and fears.
- › Let images or thoughts come and go.
- › Keep reminding yourself that you have got through hard times before.
- › Rest and use simple relaxation techniques.
- › Breathe deeply and calmly.
- › Think about your strengths and abilities and write them down.
- › Maintain a regular routine.
- › Eat appropriate amounts of nutritious food.
- › Reduce stimulants such as coffee and cigarettes.
- › Exercise regularly, even if you don't really feel like it.
- › Keep making small regular decisions.
- › Do one thing every day that you usually enjoy.
- › Be kind to yourself, accept that it might take a bit of time to adjust.
- › Gradually face the situation and memories you may wish to avoid.

Unhelpful ways of coping

- › Increased alcohol, cigarette, or drug use.
- › Making big life decisions in the first few weeks after the event.
- › Avoidance of places or thoughts to do with the event.
- › Telling yourself you are going crazy or weak.
- › Withdrawing from others.
- › Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help.

Positive changes

Sometimes struggling with challenging life events results in positive changes such as:

- › Enhanced appreciation of family and friends.
- › Closeness to others, including those who went through the experience with you.
- › More enjoyment of the here and now, living life to the fullest.
- › Increased inner strength and knowledge that difficulties can be handled.
- › Appreciation of the value of life.
- › Increased determination and resolve.

Contacts (available 24/7)

 CISS TEAM 1800 049 933 <small>Ask for the CISS Duty Officer to be paged.</small>	BENESTAR EAP 1300 360 364 <small>Counselling and support for all NSW RFS members and their immediate families.</small>
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Senior Chaplains and family support are also available.

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