

Resources available to people in emotional crisis

Mental Health Partners, a nonprofit dedicated to mental health and wellness, offers a free, 24-hour emergency psychiatric services hotline, a child crisis hotline, a rape crisis line and free referrals to other community resources, supporting those facing an emotional crisis throughout Boulder and Broomfield Counties. MHP's hotline also offers coaching, support and safety planning to friends and family members seeking assistance for a loved one experiencing a crisis.

- **Colorado Crisis Services:** 1-844-493-TALK (8255) or text TALK to 38255
- **Walk-In Center:** 303-447-1665 (or go directly to 3180 Airport Rd., Boulder—open 24/7)
- **Sexual Assault Hotline:** (303) 443-7300
- **Community Resources:** (720) 406-3609

Common Signs and Signals of a Stress Reaction

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally). Even though the event may be over, and even if you were not directly involved, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite *normal*, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through or been made aware of a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage alone. Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

Cognitive

- confusion
- nightmares
- uncertainty
- hypervigilance
- suspiciousness
- intrusive images
- blaming someone
- poor problem solving
- poor abstract thinking
- poor attention/ decisions
- poor concentration memory
- disorientation of time, place or person

- difficulty identifying objects or people
- heightened or lowered alertness
- increased or decreased awareness of surroundings

Behavioral

- withdrawal
- antisocial acts
- inability to rest
- intensified pacing
- erratic movements
- change in social activity
- change in speech patterns
- loss or increase of appetite
- hyper alert to environment
- increased alcohol consumption
- change in usual communications

Emotional

- fear
- guilt
- grief
- panic
- denial
- anxiety
- agitation
- irritability
- depression
- intense anger
- apprehension
- emotional shock
- emotional outbursts
- feeling overwhelmed
- loss of emotional control
- inappropriate emotional response

Physical*

- chills
- thirst
- fatigue
- nausea
- fainting
- twitches
- vomiting
- dizziness
- weakness

- chest pain
- headaches
- elevated BP
- rapid heart rate
- muscle tremors
- shock symptoms
- grinding of teeth
- visual difficulties
- profuse sweating
- difficulty breathing

** Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.*

STEPS TO TRY:

WITHIN THE FIRST 24 - 48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.

- Structure your time; keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out; people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer him even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks - they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

Listen carefully.

- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if the individual has not asked for help.
- Reassure the individual that the individual is safe.
- Help the individual with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give the individual some private time.
- Don't take the individual's anger or other feelings personally.

- Don't suggest that the individual is "lucky it wasn't worse;" a traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell the individual that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist.

Source: X:\Literature\Traumatic Death-Disasters\Common Signs and Signals of a Stress Reaction.doc 10/3/07

MHP also connects individuals and families to other resources in the community affecting an individual's mental well-being, such as housing, food assistance, benefits, education, shelters, domestic violence resources, low-cost medical services, rent and utility assistance.

Each year, MHP's emergency psychiatric services hotline answers more than 10,000 calls from individuals seeking help coping with their emotions and the rape crisis line helps more than 1,000 survivors of sexual assault.