

Tragic events—such as natural disasters, fire, financial loss or the death of a loved one—can be sudden, confusing and provoke stress. Events that are out of our control create feelings of helplessness, distress, anxiety and fear. Often it is hard to process what is happening and you may think that your reactions are not normal.

Since each person is unique, however, it is not unusual to react to unusual events in a variety of ways. For example, some people may feel shock and denial after a traumatic event.

Shock is a sudden, intense upset that leaves you feeling stunned or dazed. Denial is when you do not admit to yourself or others that something very stressful has just happened.

### What is the normal way to react?

There is no normal way to react. Each of us reacts in different way. Some people may feel a surge of energy that helps them cope for a short time while others withdraw.

For others, it may take a while for feelings to come to the surface. It may happen days, months, or even years later.



### Some ways you may react

If you have been through a trauma, it is normal that you may:

- Feel numb or dazed, like you are just going through the motions of living
- Have vivid memories of the event or flashbacks that occur over and over again for no apparent reason
- Think about what happened all the time
- Feel guilty or blame yourself
- Have memory problems; perhaps have a hard time recalling certain details of the event
- Be more moody than usual; get easily upset by small things, feel angry or resentful
- Avoid friends, co-workers and family
- Feel a need to protect your loved ones or fear for their safety
- Feel restless or talk non-stop
- Feel sad and cry more often
- Avoid people, places, or things that remind you of the event
- Have bad dreams or trouble sleeping
- Feel tired, helpless or without hope
- Lose your desire for sex
- Feel physical symptoms such as headaches, fast heartbeat, shaking or

sweating. If you were ill before the event, you may get worse because of the stress you are under.

- Eat less (or more) than you did before
- Lose interest in daily activities such as cleaning the house or personal hygiene.
- Drink more alcohol or smoke more than you did before, or do drugs
- Doubt yourself and others; double check things
- Have trouble focusing on work or making decisions
- Feelings can come flooding back at any time - days, months or years later. Just the sound of a siren or something you see on TV can trigger a reaction

**These are normal reactions to a stressful situation**



### When will you get back to normal?

Just as reactions are unique to the individual, how long it takes to recover depends on:

- The severity of the event, how long it lasted and how much was lost
- Your general coping skills
- How you were coping prior to the

event. People who were already coping with other problems, such as bad health or family problems, may react more strongly to the new stressful event and need more time to recover

### How to help your family and yourself

There are things you can do to help yourself feel better and begin to regain control after a traumatic event. For example,

- Give yourself time and permission to heal. Accept that you have been through a difficult time. Let yourself mourn your emotional, physical and material losses
- Ask for support from people who listen without judging. Keep in mind that people with whom you have shared a tragic event may not be emotionally available
- Consider attending a support group. Groups can be helpful, especially if it is hard for you to talk to family or friends. They also can reduce a feeling of isolation with the event
- Take care of yourself; go out for walks, get plenty of rest, and eat healthy foods at regular times
- If you are having trouble relaxing or sleeping, you may be able to find deep breathing methods useful

over...

- Avoid alcohol or drugs (unless a doctor prescribes them)
- Take some time off to do things you have enjoyed in the past
- If possible, put off making major life changes for at least one year

Remember what is unusual is the event.

### Signs you are getting better

You begin to...

- Think about the event less and less
- View the event and its fallout as something you can get past and overcome
- Feel your emotions are more bearable
- Slowly get back to your daily activities
- Smile or enjoy yourself again



- Eat a healthy diet and sleep well

### When to seek professional help

If your feelings and actions seem extreme or do not ease up after a few weeks, and it starts to affect your relations with others or your work...

**A qualified counsellor or therapist can help. Talk to:**

- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at your place of work
- Jeffery Hale Community Services: counselling by social workers and referrals to other English-speaking professionals  
418 684-JEFF (5333), ext. 1580
- Your local CLSC
- Your family doctor
- The Centre de prévention du suicide  
418 683-4588
- The Centre de crise  
418 688-4240

Source: Managing Traumatic Stress: Tips for Recovering from Disasters and Other Traumatic Events, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, April 1998.

### One number

If you live in the Greater Quebec City region and would like health and social services in English, please call the Jeffery Hale at:

» **418 684-JEFF (5333)**  
1 888 984-5333 toll-free

- Emergency Room
- Diagnostic Services
- Senior Care
- Community Services (CLSC-type services in English)



**Jeffery Hale**

418 684-JEFF (5333)  
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Québec QC G1S 2M6

[www.jefferyhale.org](http://www.jefferyhale.org)

### Coping...



**after a trauma or a tragedy:**  
Tips for helping yourself or someone you care about

[www.jefferyhale.org](http://www.jefferyhale.org)



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**Jeffery Hale**