

# Recognise crisis reactions

We all have an individual reaction to sudden and shocking events. Despite our individual reactions to crises, recognising common crisis reactions helps you understand your own emotions or the behaviour of other people after a shocking event. It is also good to remember that reacting is natural and normal.

## Crisis reactions during and immediately after the event

Psychological shock is the mind's way of protecting itself from what has happened and focusing the human resources on survival and action.

Shock may manifest in the following ways:

- Time seems to stop.
- You feel numb and surreal; you do not necessarily experience much emotion.
- It is hard to think clearly.
- Some people experience physical symptoms, such as dizziness, nausea, shaking and sweating. The pulse and breathing can become faster.

**A person can go into shock** during a traumatic event or immediately after it. You can support a person in shock by helping them calm down and making sure that they are safe.

**Physical shock** is connected to sudden drop in blood pressure. It is not the same thing as psychological shock. You can read more about physical shock on our first aid webpages..

## Crisis reactions days and weeks after the event

Reactions after having been in shock depend on the seriousness of the event, among other factors.

### In the days and weeks after a traumatic event, people can experience

- Relief
- Sadness and anger
- Guilt for surviving and for the losses of others
- Fear that the event will reoccur
- Inability to make decisions and plan everyday life
- Feeling disconnected and having difficulty in explaining their emotions to others
- Physical symptoms, such as pain, loss of appetite and trouble sleeping.

## Crisis reactions weeks and months after the event

When weeks and months have passed since the traumatic event, most people begin to accept the changes in their lives and adapt to them.

However, fear, anger, anxiety, irritation, sadness and hopelessness are still normal feelings.

**Stress reactions can include**

- Hyperactivity, being constantly active
- Being passive and withdrawing from others
- Heightened vigilance and an overprotective approach to loved ones
- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns

Psychological first aid can still be helpful, but long-term stress reactions are a sign of needing professional help.

**Crisis reactions years after the event**

Most people recover from crisis situations and are able to adapt to the life changes they generate. However, situations reminding of the traumatic event can trigger a stress reaction.

Sadness is a normal reaction to loss, e.g. divorce, move, illness or death of a loved one. It is important to remember that grief follows no schedule. However, if sadness feels unsurmountable, you may require assistance from a mental health professional.

**It is never too late to seek help.**