

# NORMAL REACTIONS TO ABNORMAL EVENTS



Whether or not you are directly affected by an abnormal event, it is normal to feel anxious about your own safety, to picture the event in your own mind, and to wonder how you would react in an emergency. People react in different ways to abnormal events. Some may become irritable or depressed, others lose sleep or have nightmares, and others may deny their feelings or simply “blank out” the troubling event. Some people experience disbelief that what happened was real, or now feel disconnected from what is going on.

## **THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO FEEL AFTER EXPERIENCING AN UNSETTLING EVENT**

Symptoms may include confusion, emotional numbness or difficulty concentrating. The intensity of these feelings might be unexpected.

It is common to be angry at or blame people who have caused great pain or harm to others. This desire comes from your outrage for the innocent victims. One must understand, though, that it is futile to respond in an aggressive manner. Nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or actions.

You may experience a feeling of being unsafe or vulnerable that may develop into a heightened, even excessive, fear of further threats to your safety at work and elsewhere. You might find yourself constantly looking over your shoulder, becoming easily startled or re-checking locks on doors and windows.

While it may feel better to pretend the event did not happen, in the long run, it is best to be honest about your feelings and to allow yourself to acknowledge the sense of loss and uncertainty. It is important to realize that while things may seem off balance for a while, your life will return to normal. It is important to talk with someone about your sorrow, anger, and other emotions, even though it may be difficult to get started.

Don't be surprised if you notice more conflict in marital or other relationships, particularly in your workplace.

While you will always remember the event, the painful feelings will decrease over time, and you will come to understand that in learning to cope with hardship, you have become stronger, more adaptable, and more self-reliant.



## TIPS FOR COPING:

**Talk about it.** Talking with friends, colleagues, family members or a counselor will help you realize that you are not alone in your feelings.

**Limit media viewing.** Take breaks from watching news coverage of the event.

**Take care of yourself.** Taking good physical care of yourself with rest, exercise, and healthy eating will help your body to deal with stress. Do activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.

**Avoid excess.** Avoid using alcohol, drugs, and tobacco products as a way of dealing with stress.

**Resume routines.** Getting back to your daily routines in life can be a good method for regaining a sense of control.

**Get involved.** Engaging in positive activities like group discussions and candlelight vigils can help promote comfort and healing.

**Recognize your strengths for coping.** Also accept your limitations. Give yourself as much time as needed to heal

**Take security precautions.** Make an inventory of what will make you feel secure in your home, workplace and when you are out in public.





## WHEN TO CALL AND ASK FOR HELP:

- You find yourself reliving old traumas you thought were healed.
- Your feelings of anger, fear, vulnerability or blame just won't go away.
- You find that you are drinking more or using other drugs to help you get through.
- Your functioning at work, home or school is being affected by your emotional stress.
- You have flashbacks, or think you see objects or people when they aren't there.
- You have thoughts of wanting to harm yourself or another person.

**If you don't have someone in whom to confide,  
call REACH EAP at **800-950-3434****