

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

After a stressful experience, including those involving loss, children's grief is often abrupt and they may switch quickly from intense grief reactions to play and having fun. Almost all children play, even if they have gone through an intense crisis event.

Younger children may:

- behave aggressively towards caregivers or other children;
- cling to their caregivers;
- show signs of separation anxiety; or
- regress to the behaviour of younger children such as bedwetting, thumb sucking or not being able to sleep alone.

In such situations, stable and secure relationships and establishing predictable routines contribute to a supportive environment.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Extreme stress reactions will most likely affect your health and daily life, both at work and privately. Coping with and recovering from the effects of a crisis situation can take a long time. Coping is the process of managing difficult circumstances and finding ways of minimizing or tolerating the effects of stress.

It is important to find ways of coping with the stress reactions. The following can help:

- Recognize your own feelings.
- Give yourself time to recover; it's natural that you grieve.
- Whenever possible, take time off and do something you enjoy; encourage your children to do the same (play, draw pictures, etc.)
- Talk with your child about his/her feelings and your feelings and about what happened, providing factual information that she or he can understand.
- Reassure your child that you are both safe and that what happened is not a result of something he/she has done.



WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

The stress reactions described in this pamphlet may last several weeks. If the reactions persist and make it impossible to function normally over a long period of time, seek help. One option is to contact the local health facility or a local crisis support line.

DISCLAIMER

The information provided in this brochure is general. It does not constitute, and should not be relied on, as medical advice. The Canadian Red Cross Society recommends seeking advice from a qualified health professional if you have experienced a crisis. The information herein is based on material obtained from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support.



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COPING WITH CRISIS



NORMAL REACTIONS TO ABNORMAL EVENTS

It is normal to react when experiencing an abnormal situation. This is important to remember when experiencing stress reactions.

Everyone who has lived through a crisis situation will most probably experience extreme stress. Such stress usually causes unpleasant reactions.

This brochure highlights common reactions to extreme stress and gives suggestions on how to cope with them.

It's important to remember that **stress reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.**

UNDERSTANDING YOUR REACTIONS

Stress is a state of pressure or strain that affects body and mind. It can be caused by any positive or negative change. Stress is an ordinary feature of everyday life and is positive when it makes a person perform optimally e.g. during an exam.

When faced with a strong or sudden emotion and physical strain, such as a crisis situation, most will experience extreme stress. Ordinary negative stress may accumulate over a period of time and may become a negative spiral. Extreme stress can seriously affect a person's health, working ability and private life.

The impact on both physical and mental health can be lessened by:

- Understanding what causes stress.
- Understanding common and normal responses to disasters/emergencies.
- Learning how to manage your reactions to these experiences.
- Focusing on the things you can control, and trying to let go of the things you cannot.

IT MAY HELP TO:

- Maintain daily routines and do things that normally give you pleasure.
- Eat healthy foods, get sleep and exercise if possible.
- Socialize with other people.
- Accept support and assistance.
- Allow yourself to feel sad and grieve.
- Give someone a hug.
- Take small steps.

WHAT YOU MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING

Reactions to extreme stress may vary and can include physical, emotional and behavioural reactions such as:

- sleeping problems
- headaches
- muscle tension and bodily pains
- fast heart beat
- nausea
- anxiety
- watchfulness
- poor concentration
- guilt
- sadness
- anger
- disorientation
- having intrusive memories
- trying to avoid being reminded of the crisis situation.

Some people also react by not feeling anything at all, by having difficulties in making decisions or by isolating themselves from others. Some people increase their intake of alcohol, medicine or drugs to escape the pain they are feeling.

