

COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA – ADULTS

Below you will find some reactions and symptoms that are often experienced by individuals who have been through a trauma. These symptoms reflect your body's way of trying to cope and adjust to what has happened.

Behavioral

Avoidance behaviors
Use of alcohol or drugs to numb
(prescription or not)
Abandonment of fun activities
Overly involved in work
Desire to leave field
Less productive
Losing or misplacing things
Easily startled/Hyperalert to
environment
Tearful
Slowed down or Hyperactivity
Aimless wandering
Dejection
Hysteria
Sudden lifestyle changes
Sleep disorders

Risky/Self-Destructive Behaviors

Increased smoking
Excessive spending
Accident prone
Sexual immorality

Affective (Emotional)

Numb/Emotionally shut down
Shocked
Anxious/Fearful
Fear of recurrence
Agitated
Irritability
Frustration
Panicked or fearful (specific or
general)
Overwhelmed
Anger (at self, others, God)
Resentment/Rage
Mood swings
Troubling dreams
Sad
Depression
Grief
Helpless or inadequate feelings
Sense of guilt
Loss of sense of humor
Less able to cope with new or
continued emotional stress

Somatic (Physical)

Pounding heart
Sweating or Flushed
Short of Breath/Hyperventilation
Chest Pains
Nausea/Vomiting
Upset stomach, Cramps, Diarrhea
Loss of appetite or crave junk food
Muscle tremors or soreness
Muffled hearing
Loss of Coordination
Frequent headaches or migraines
Rapid uncontrolled speech
Difficulty sitting or relaxing
Dizzy or fainting
Dryness of mouth and throat
Frequent need to urinate
Grinding of teeth
Inability to shake a cold
Weight change (gain or loss)
Insomnia, nightmares
Feeling of exhaustion and fatigue
Change in sexual function or desire
Missed menstrual cycle

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Interpersonal

Irritability
Easily Frustrated
Insensitivity
Loss of interest in others
Isolating/Distancing from others
Avoidance of intimacy
Suspicious
Clingy
Discord/Arguments
Critical of others
Scapegoating (a focal point for suppressed anger and depression)
Hypersensitivity (feelings easily hurt)
Family problems
Compulsive talking

Cognitive (Thoughts)

Disbelief
Horror
Confusion
Poor concentration
Spaciness
Poor decision making abilities
Trouble prioritizing
Disorientation
Poor memory
Poor attention
Preoccupied w/ trauma memories
Preoccupation with health
Time distortion (slower or faster)
Increased rigid, inflexible thinking
Feeling omnipotent
(unrealistic view of capacity)

Cynicism or negativism
Absolute thinking
(I will never; this always)
Negative judgments against self
(I am such a failure)
Hindsight thinking
(if only; why didn't)
Flashbacks, intrusive imagery

Meaning/Ministry

Increasingly busy with task orientation
Loss of sense of purpose/role
Less meaning in ministry
Disappointment with God
Loss of motivation
Questioning former beliefs

Conclusions: Each person is unique in how they respond to a trauma, so your response may not be the same as another person who has gone through the same or a similar experience. Remember that it takes time to heal. After you work through these reactions, you will come to a new place in your life that is characterized by deeper understanding, healthy conclusions, resilience, deeper trust, and an expanded world view. You will be one who has suffered and yet thrived. Even after many of the memories are gone and you are feeling much better, there may still be things which “trigger” these symptoms and painful memories. If these symptoms become very intense and persist over a long period of time, or if you are noticing impairment in your ministry or relationships, you may want to consider talking with a counselor who specializes in trauma. This does not mean that you are crazy, only that you need some help. For more information, see www.mmct.org or write MMCT at carrmmct@gmail.com.