

Effects of Traumatic Events

All of us at some point in our lives have experienced difficult or traumatic events. Some of these events have a huge impact on our lives and others very little. What is important to realize is that difficult experiences affect us to some degree. *With support and emotionally and physically working through these experiences they lose their “charge” thus no longer interfering with our ability to live a rich and purposeful life.* However, many times difficult experiences don't get healed but rather literally get stored in your body. Without your awareness they can play out in your daily life. For instance, you get easily scared for no apparent reason. The opposite can occur too. You may be painfully aware of how past experiences still affect you but feel unable to do anything about it.

What follows are common reactions to traumatic events. *These reactions can occur right away, “out of the blue”, or after an extended period of time. Often there is no medical explanation for the physical symptoms and high levels of anxiety.* Keep in mind that everyone may have a different definition as to what “trauma” is as well as have different reactions to traumatic events. You may be experiencing many of these reactions or very few. Some you may be experiencing more intensely than others. Often, the unpredictability of these reactions can make you feel like you are “going crazy” because you can't make sense of what is happening to you. This is all very common. You may notice extremes are listed (i.e., mood swings, emotionally numb). Often there is no middle ground with traumatic reactions. You can feel at the mercy of your reactions.

Physical Reactions

Difficulty falling or staying asleep
Eating difficulties (loss of appetite, excessive eating)
Fatigue, exhaustion, low energy
Upset stomach
Sweating or chills
Pounding heart and/or chest pains
Dizziness
Trouble breathing and/or feelings of suffocation
Chronic tension and clenching in body
Jumpy
High pain tolerance or unusually low ability to handle pain
Feeling “frozen” or collapsed in your body
Inability to feel parts of your body
Unexplained physical pain
Sensitivity to light and sound

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Emotional Reactions

Anxious
Sad
Angry – at self or others
Irritable
Mood swings
Easily overwhelmed
Limited range of emotions or feeling emotionally numb
Difficulty experiencing positive feelings (i.e, joy, love, happiness)
Hopeless
Guilt
Shame
Feeling powerless
Easily stressed out

Difficulties in Thinking

Feeling “spacey”
Forgetfulness
Trouble making decisions
Confusion
Difficulty concentrating
Flashbacks and nightmares (reliving aspects of the event)
Intrusive, repetitive and negative thoughts
Too many thoughts at once and/or obsessing
Avoidance of thoughts/images related to the event
Feeling as if your future plans or hopes will not come true
Thoughts of suicide
Memory gaps
Feeling as though you are losing your mind or going crazy
Loss of interest in people and activities you once found enjoyable
Inability to trust others
Poor self-image
Feeling distant or cut off from people around you
Feeling disconnected from God/spiritual teachings
Very narrow focus of attention

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Behaviors

General changes in how you would normally act
Exaggerated startle response
Difficulty relaxing
Feeling overly alert
Emotionally and physically reacting to cues associated with the experience
Withdrawing from other people
Clinging to other people
Distrustful
Quieter or more talkative than usual
Changes in eating patterns
Substance abuse
Engaging in riskier behaviors
More accident prone
Avoiding people, places, or activities, especially those associated with the difficult experiences
Difficulty making commitments
Difficulty playing

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