

## Common Responses to and Ways to Cope with Post-Traumatic Stress

Although traumatic experiences affect people differently, there are some common reactions that you may experience. Some people may experience little reaction to the event while others may experience strong reactions. These signs could begin right away, or you may feel fine for a couple of days or weeks and then later experience a sudden reaction. The important thing to remember is that these reactions are quite normal; although you may feel some distress, you are probably experiencing a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Counseling services and same-day crisis intervention are available through the *Center for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS; 704-687-0311; <http://caps.uncc.edu>)* to help students manage personal distress and provide them with the skills to function and meet the demands of a campus environment.

### Some common responses to post-traumatic stress are...

<b>Physical Reactions:</b>	<b>Emotional Reactions:</b>	<b>Effect on Productivity:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• insomnia/nightmares</li> <li>• fatigue</li> <li>• hyperactivity or "nervous energy"</li> <li>• appetite changes</li> <li>• pain in the neck or back</li> <li>• headaches</li> <li>• heart palpitations or pains in the chest</li> <li>• dizzy spells</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flashbacks or "reliving" the event</li> <li>• excessive jumpiness or tendency to be startled</li> <li>• irritability or anger</li> <li>• feelings of anxiety or helplessness</li> <li>• emotional numbness</li> <li>• discomfort being alone</li> <li>• isolation or withdrawal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inability to concentrate</li> <li>• more frequent mistakes</li> <li>• lapses of memory</li> <li>• missing class or work</li> </ul>

### Ways to Cope With Post-Traumatic Stress

- Be tolerant of your reactions -- they are normal and will subside with time for most people. Acknowledge that it may be a while before you are entirely back to "normal."
- Give yourself time. You may feel better for a while, then have a "relapse." This is normal. Allow plenty of time to adjust to the new realities.
- Spend time with others, even though it may be difficult at first. It is easy to withdraw when you are hurt, but keep in mind support can be helpful.
- Talk about the experience with your friends. For most people, talking helps relieve some of the intense emotions we feel under stress.
- Try to keep your normal routine. Staying active will keep your mind on events other than the trauma, will give you a sense of comfort with familiar tasks, and will help put some psychological "distance" between you and the event.
- Structure your time even more carefully than usual. It is normal to forget things when you are under stress. Keep lists and double-check any important work.
- Maintain control where you can. Make small decisions, even if you feel that it is unimportant or you do not care. It is important to maintain control in some areas of your life.
- Consider taking meaningful action to do something about the related causes of the trauma or something that allows you to feel more control, (e.g., join groups that address issues related to the event, look for ways to help others).
- Ask for help if you are particularly bothered by your reactions to the event, or notice that they interfere substantially with your social life or work. Call CAPS and set up an appointment (704-687-0311).