Common Responses to High Stress and/or Trauma

Self Test: Put a check beside the responses that describe you.

After experiencing a traumatic event, or in response to cumulative stressors, it is common -- and normal -- to experience a wide range of emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual reactions. These responses may appear immediately after the event(s) *or some time later*. ***These are normal reactions to abnormal situations****.* The following are some of the most common responses:

# Emotional

| **Check** | **Reaction(s)** |
| --- | --- |
|  | Fear |
|  | Terror |
|  | Anxiety |
|  | Panic / Paranoia |
|  | Anger / Rage |
|  | Apprehension |
|  | Depression |
|  | Vengefulness |
|  | Shame |
|  | Guilt |
|  | Sadness |
|  | Grief |
|  | Emotional shock |
|  | Emotional outbursts |
|  | Loss of emotional control |
|  | Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness |
|  | Feeling numb |
|  | Irritability |
|  | COURAGE |

# Cognitive (Thinking)

| **Check** | **Reaction(s)** |
| --- | --- |
|  | Confusion |
|  | Nightmares |
|  | Hyper-vigilance |
|  | Suspiciousness |
|  | Flashbacks |
|  | Overly sensitive |
|  | Difficulty making decisions, spacey |
|  | Poor concentration |
|  | Memory problems |
|  | Shortened attention span |
|  | Critical, blaming |
|  | Poor problem solving and abstract thinking |
|  | Preoccupied with the event(s): inability to recall all or parts of the event |
|  | Disoriented to person, place or time |
|  | Heightened or lowered awareness |

# Behavioral (doing)

| **Check** | **Reaction(s)** |
| --- | --- |
|  | Withdrawal |
|  | Self-harm |
|  | Overwork |
|  | Antisocial acts |
|  | Inability to rest, pacing |
|  | Hyper-alertness |
|  | Erratic movement |
|  | Suspiciousness |
|  | Emotional outbursts |
|  | Change in speech patterns |
|  | Increased alcohol/drug use |
|  | Avoiding places related to the event |
|  | Difficulty writing or talking |
|  | Impaired sexual functioning |
|  | Loss or increase of appetite |
|  | Feeling clumsy |
|  | Domestic Violence |
|  | CARING FOR OTHERS |

# Physical

| **Check** | **Reaction(s)** |
| --- | --- |
|  | Thirst/dry mouth |
|  | Twitches |
|  | Vomiting |
|  | Weakness |
|  | Chest pain |
|  | High BP |
|  | Rapid heart rate |
|  | Muscle tremors |
|  | Visual difficulties |
|  | Nausea/diarrhea |
|  | Shallow breathing |
|  | Dizziness or faintness |
|  | Chills or sweating |
|  | Easily startled |
|  | Fatigue |
|  | Changes in appetite |
|  | Sleep disturbances |
|  | Headaches |
|  | Grinding teeth |
|  | Inability to rest |

# Spiritual

| **Check** | **Reaction(s)** |
| --- | --- |
|  | Emptiness |
|  | Loss of meaning |
|  | Doubt |
|  | Feeling unforgiven |
|  | Martyrdom, feeling punished |
|  | Looking for magic |
|  | Loss of direction |
|  | Cynicism |
|  | Apathy |
|  | Needing to “prove” self |
|  | Alienated |
|  | Mistrust |
|  | Crisis of faith |
|  | GROWTH |

# Societal Effects

| **Check** | **Reaction(s)** |
| --- | --- |
|  | Apathy |
|  | Silence/impaired communication |
|  | Aggressive behavior |
|  | Isolation |
|  | Lack of empathy |
|  | Denial |
|  | Low energy/low productivity |
|  | Inflexibility |
|  | High rates of alcoholism, drug abuse |
|  | High rates of (untreated) mental health issues (depression, sexual dysfunction, etc.) |
|  | High rates of stress- related health issues (and medication use) |
|  | Intergenerational transmission of pain |
|  | SPIRITUAL GROWTH, WISDOM |

*Adapted from the work of Jim Norman, M.ED, C.T.S Oklahoma City, OK Copyright © 2016* [*Eastern Mennonite University*](https://emu.edu/cjp/star/)