After experiencing a trauma, most people will have some form of stress reactions. As trauma survivor, often your first emotion is a relief to be alive. This may be followed by fear, anger or feeling overwhelmed by emotions you cannot describe. You may have heightened reactions to certain sounds or even sights. These reactions may last for several days or even weeks. Most people find that these symptoms slowly decrease.

**What are common reactions to trauma?**

Understanding what is happening to you, when you experience reactions to a traumatic event, will help you feel less fearful and better able to handle to situation. Or for someone who knows you, they can support you by reminding you what is happening and help you work through the stress reaction.

**Reactions to a trauma may include:**

* Feeling hopeless about the future
* Feeling detached or unconcerned about others
* Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
* Feeling jumpy and getting startled easily at sudden noises
* Feeling on guard and constantly alert
* Having disturbing dreams and memories or flashbacks
* Having work or school problems

**You may also experience more physical reactions such as:**

* Stomach upset and trouble eating
* Trouble sleeping and feeling very tired
* Pounding heart, rapid breathing, feeling edgy
* Sweating
* Severe headache if thinking of the event
* Failure to engage in exercise, diet, safe sex, regular health care
* Excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, food
* Having your ongoing medical problems get worse

**You may have more emotional troubles such as:**

* Feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, sad
* Feeling shocked, numb, and not able to feel love or joy
* Avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
* Being irritable or having outbursts of anger
* Becoming easily upset or agitated
* Blaming yourself or having negative views of oneself or the world
* Distrust of others, getting into conflicts, being over controlling
* Being withdrawn, feeling rejected or abandoned
* Loss of intimacy or feeling detached

**Recovery from stress reactions**

When you are ready to talk, find family members and friends who you feel safe talking to. They are you personal support system. Remember that recovery is an ongoing, gradual process. Most people recover naturally from trauma, but if your stress reactions begin to interfere with your relationships or other important activities in your life, then you may want to find a counselor or talk to your doctor. There is support available to help you get through this experience.

**Common problems that can occur after a trauma**

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** You may have PTSD if symptoms have lasted over 2 months. If you are still having trouble keeping yourself from thinking over and over about what happened to you. You try to avoid people and places that remind you of the trauma. You feel numb. You might find that you have trouble relaxing because you easily startle and feel on guard, most of the time.

**Depression.** Depression involves feeling down or sad more days than not. If you are depressed, you may lose interest in activities that used to be enjoyable or fun. You may feel low in energy. You may feel hopeless thinking that things will never get better. If you are depressed, at times you might think about hurting or killing yourself. For this reason, getting help for depression is very important.

**Self-blame, guilt and shame.** Sometimes in trying to make sense of a traumatic event, you may blame yourself. You may think you are responsible for bad things that happened, or for surviving when others didn't. You may feel guilty for what you did or did not do. Remember, we all tend to be our own worst critics. Most of the time, that guilt, shame or self-blame is not justified.

**Suicidal thoughts.** Trauma and personal loss can lead a depressed person to think about hurting or killing themselves. If you are feeling suicidal, call someone you trust and tell them how you are feeling, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) [http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/). You can also call a counselor, doctor, or 911.

**Anger or aggressive behavior.** After a trauma, you might think that what happened to you was unfair or unjust. You might not understand why the event happened and why it happened to you. These thoughts can result in intense anger. Although anger is a natural and healthy emotion, intense feelings of anger and aggressive behavior can cause problems with family, friends, or co-workers. If you become violent when angry, you just make the situation worse. Violence can lead to people being injured, and there may be legal consequences.

**Alcohol/Drug abuse.** Drinking or "self-medicating" with drugs is a common, and unhealthy, way of coping with upsetting events. You may use alcohol or drugs to numb yourself from the difficult thoughts, feelings, and memories related to the trauma. While using alcohol or drugs may offer a short-lived solution, it can actually lead to more problems.

http://www.ptsd.va.gov