

Trauma Response Services

610 Valley Health Plaza, Paramus, NJ 07456

24 Hour Emergency Hotline:

1-888-327-2637

Stages of Reactions for Traumatic Incidents

Shock/denial > Anger > Despair > Detachment > Rebuilding

Traumatic Reactions may be experienced due to the impact of sudden, random exposure to a life threatening event. Survivors usually experience reactions which they must confront before they can even begin to process their trauma. Crisis and trauma reactions may complicate the recovery process. In addition to the extended time it takes to deal with reactions to the traumatic event, it is not unusual that the time it takes to begin to cope with the incident is also prolonged.

Shock/Denial: These reactions are manifested in confusion, avoidance and refusal to participate in acknowledgements. These reactions are paralleled by other emotions that follow and occur in response to sudden, unexpected trauma.

Anger: Anger is used instead of protest; most survivors concentrate on anger aimed at self, loved ones, faith based values or the world. Anger usually manifests itself in irritability, lack of concentration, frenzied activity, and eventually fatigue or exhaustion.

Despair: Despair follows anger, and includes depression, hopelessness as well as agony. Survivors may experience an inability to think or act. There may be an urge to recover what has been lost, but this urge is accompanied by the recognition that there can be no recovery.

Detachment: The sense of despair that exists following a traumatic loss cannot be maintained indefinitely. Survivors may need to become detached, simply because being engaged in everyday life becomes too painful.

Rebuilding: Reconstruction can only take place after there is an integration of the traumatic event along with reactions, as well as the acknowledgement that things will never be the same. Survival continues despite the pain accompanying trauma exposure.

After the process begins, survivors may continue to have components of traumatic reactions for a period of time. For most people, they eventually subside and a new life can be constructed. One of the most important components of reorganizing a new way of life is the belief in hope for the future.

Information contained in this handout contains excerpts from the National Organization for Victim Assistance.

For Emergencies Please Call our 24 Hour Hotline to Request TRT Services.

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