

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

Referrals and linkage to wellbeing resources both on and off campus are available through the Center for Integrated Care (CIC; 704-687-1045; <http://cic.charlotte.edu>), a one-stop shop providing coordination of care and continuity of care services, and follow-up for students.

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

#### **Physical Reactions:**

- Insomnia/nightmares
- Fatigue
- Appetite changes
- Pain in the neck or back
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Pains in the chest
- Dizzy spells
- Hyperactivity or “nervous energy”

#### **Emotional Reactions:**

- Flashbacks or “reliving” the event
- Excessive jumpiness
- Irritability or anger
- Emotional numbness
- Feelings of anxiety or helplessness
- Tendency to be startled
- Discomfort being alone
- Isolation or withdrawal

#### **Effect on Productivity:**

- Inability to concentrate
- More frequent mistakes
- Lapses of memory
- Missing classes or work

### **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 that support can be helpful.
- Talk about the one you have lost 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 loss, will give you a sense of comfort with familiar tasks, and will help put some psychological "distance" between you and the loss.
- 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.
- Ask for help if you are particularly bothered by your reactions to the loss, or notice that they interfere substantially with your social life or work.