

## After a Traumatic Event

### Common Responses and Coping Strategies

It is very common and normal for people to have reactions after they have experienced a traumatic event, have witnessed a traumatic event, or are close to someone who has been the victim of a traumatic event. Traumatic events affect each person differently. Even though the event is over, you may be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional and physical reactions.

Sometimes reactions appear immediately after the event. Sometimes they appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before reactions appear. Critical incident stress symptoms can last days, weeks, months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event.

Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be helpful. This does not imply weakness, but simply indicates that this particular event was too powerful to manage alone. You are welcome to contact the Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance Program (JHEAP) at **888-978-1262**.

JHEAP is a confidential counseling service, provided at no cost to employees and their household members.

Here is a list of some common signs of a critical incident stress reaction. **Remember - these are normal responses to an abnormal event:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cognitive Reactions</b></li> <li>• Confusion/Difficulty Concentrating</li> <li>• Difficulty Making Decisions</li> <li>• Decreased Alertness/Memory Lapses</li> <li>• Intrusive Images/Thoughts</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Replaying the Event</li> <li>• Disbelief</li> <li>• Search for Meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Physical Reactions</b></li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Insomnia</li> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Nausea/Gastrointestinal Problems</li> <li>• Hunger or Loss of Appetite</li> <li>• Rapid Breathing</li> <li>• Chest Pain*</li> <li>• Dizziness*</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Emotional Reactions</b></li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Self-Blame</li> <li>• Loss of Emotional Control</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Emotional Numbness</li> <li>• Helplessness</li> <li>• Apathy/Boredom</li> <li>• Anger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Behavioral Reactions</b></li> <li>• Withdrawal from Others</li> <li>• Suspiciousness</li> <li>• Substance Abuse</li> <li>• Easily Startled</li> <li>• Changes in Normal Activities</li> <li>• Hypervigilance</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diminished Sexual Drive</li><li>• Restlessness</li></ul>
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\* If you experience these symptoms, see a physician.

## Practical Tips to Help You Cope With the Aftermath of a Traumatic Event

### For Employees

**Find someone you trust.** Find supportive people (family members, friends, coworkers) and talk with them about your experience. Don't carry this burden alone - share it with those who care about you.

**Give yourself permission to feel what you are feeling.** Acknowledge your feelings as they arise. Remember you are having normal reactions and it takes time to heal.

**Take care of yourself.** Get enough rest and eat regularly. Keep up your exercise routine if you have one. Don't abuse drugs or alcohol - they can hinder and delay recovery. Make your environment as pleasant as possible.

**Tune in to How Your Child is Doing.** Be supportive and compassionate. If you notice a change in your son or daughter's usual activities, behaviors, or moods, discuss them.

**Take a Media Break.** Minimize your exposure to all types of media. While getting the news informs you, being overexposed can augment your distress, Instead, seek out things you enjoy to lift your spirits.

**Know your limits.** Avoid stressful situations for a while.

**Practice relaxation.** Meditate if you know how, if not, visualize a quiet scene. You can't always get away, but you can hold a vision in your mind - a quiet country scene for example, will temporarily take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation.

**Manage Anxiety.** Ask yourself what specific worries are troubling you most and then seek information to address them. Having that information eliminates the fears created by anxiety.

**Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.** Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life. However, delay making major life decisions until your symptoms decrease significantly.

**Take one thing at a time.** For people under tension, an ordinary workload may suddenly seem overwhelming. This is a temporary condition and you can work through it, taking it one step at a time. Allow time for a task. Do each job more deliberately and thoughtfully.

**Avoid hazardous activities.** There is an increased likelihood of accidents.

**For Managers**

Following a traumatic incident, everyone has some type of an emotional response.

Each person will recover at his/her own rate. Recovery can be a long and difficult process.

Tell your employees how you feel and that you are sorry they had to go through this difficult experience/event. Avoid statements like “I know how you feel” or “Everything will be all right”. These statements make some people think their feelings are not understood.

Be willing to say nothing. Just being there is often the most supportive thing you can do to help.

Remind people that their confusing emotions are normal.

Attempting to explain why the incident happened is not helpful. Your explanation may not be believed and may hurt your relationship.

Encourage people to ask for help including professional assistance from **JHEAP**.

As a manager, you are not immune to the effects of a traumatic event, regardless of whether or not you directly experienced it. Don't forget to address your own needs and responses to this incident.

**REMEMBER YOU CAN ALWAYS SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.** You don't have to go through this experience alone. **JHEAP** is available for you and your household members 24 hours a day. Just call **1-888-978-1262** or visit [www.myccaonline.com](http://www.myccaonline.com) (Company Code: JHEAP).