

COMMON REACTIONS TO DISTRESSING SITUATIONS AND EXTREME STRESS

Reactions to extreme stress and distressing events will differ from person to person. Factors that impact how a person reacts can include the type of situation that they are exposed to, previous experiences, existing coping strategies as well as access to community and social supports.

It is normal to be impacted by distressing situations and events. Listed below are common reactions. If the signs persist or worsen, it is important to connect and receive support.



PHYSICAL

Body pain, tiredness, stomachache, headache, difficulties sleeping including experiencing nightmares, difficulties falling and staying asleep, low or high levels of energy, shakiness, fast heartbeat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, changes in appetite



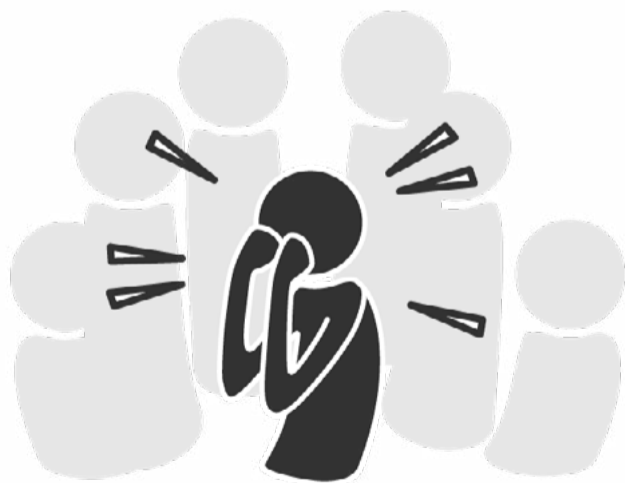
MENTAL

Difficulty concentrating, losing track of time, difficulties making decisions or solving problems, difficulties remembering things, feeling like you are reliving the event/situation over and over in your mind



EMOTIONAL

Anxiety, fearfulness, nervousness or panic, afraid the situation might happen again, feeling down or sad, numbness, feeling disconnected and detached from the world and/or people around you, feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, anger, hopelessness, irritability



INTERPERSONAL

Withdrawn, feeling that no one understands, conflict with others. It is normal to be impacted by distressing situations.



BEHAVIORAL

Impulsivity, avoiding things that are reminders of the situation, not wanting to talk about it, alcohol or substance abuse

COMMON REACTIONS TO DISTRESSING EVENTS AND SITUATIONS IN CHILDREN

Children can be impacted by distressing events even when they do not understand what has happened. They may react differently than adults to stressful situations, and their reactions are dependent on their stage of development. Distressing events can impact a child's education. Their performance may worsen, or they might work hard to become 'perfect' to avoid any negative consequences. Children sense of trust in the world around them might be disrupted.

As with adults, it is normal for children to be impacted by distressing situations and events. Below are some common reactions to distress that children may experience. Important that the adults in children's lives help them to understand and make sense of distressing experiences, and connect to MHPSS supports when needed to help prevent long-term impacts



**BABIES
(BIRTH TO 2)**

Can retain memories, sights or smells related to events. May increase in crying, clinginess, irritability, passivity (quietness, reduced sense of connectedness) increased emotional state



TODDLER (2-6)

Fear of being separated from caregivers, feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Might become more withdrawn or be in denial. May revert to behaviors like thumb sucking, bedwetting (for those that have previously gained control over their bladder), or being afraid of the dark. May act out parts of the distressing experience(s) in their play over and over again



**YOUNG
CHILDREN
(6-10)**

Easier to understand complicated issues, feelings of guilt, sense of failure, anger. May have fantasies about being the rescuer, may want to talk about the event often. Will seek ways to re-establish control. May revert to behaviours like thumb sucking, being afraid of the dark and may refuse to speak or communicate with others (sometimes even those closest to them). May be unpredictable changes in mood.



TEENS (11-18)

May react similarly to adults. Might experience irritation, reject rules or become aggressive. May become more impulsive and engage in risk-seeking behaviors like alcohol or substance use, self-harm, poor eating habits such as eating too much or far too little. May be more fearful.