

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

The word “trauma” describes an experience that is distressing enough to overwhelm the involved person’s ability to cope. These are often situations in which the individual feels severely threatened, physically or emotionally. Traumatic experiences can range significantly – anything from a minor car accident to being exposed to warfare can cause trauma.

Possible Reactions to Trauma

Below are possible reactions to trauma, it is important to remember that people can respond to trauma in different ways. An individual may respond to trauma in a way that is not listed, or an individual may not experience much of a reaction to a traumatic event.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES	PHYSICAL RESPONSES	BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES
Guilt	Nightmares	Lifestyle changes
Shame	Shaking	
Embarrassment	Anxiety/Fear	Avoiding normal daily activities such as work or school
Denial or Doubt	Pain	
Anger	Headaches	Avoiding people
Distrust	Sleeplessness	
Hopelessness	Exhaustion	Increasing use of alcohol/drugs
Loss of control/powerlessness	Stomach problems	
Numb or restricted range of feelings	Appetite changes	Refusing to talk about what happened or limiting conversation about the event.
Hyper-alert	Sexual fears or problems	
Detached	Flashbacks	Denying that the event happened
Need to control	Difficulty concentrating or remembering things	
Depression	Unpleasant memories resurfacing	Acting like the event was no big deal
Concern with burdening others		Substance use

REMEMBER!

Every person is unique and may have different reactions after experiencing domestic or sexual violence. **It is not your fault!** Survivors of violence are never to blame for the violence — no matter where or how it happens.

