

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

- Guilt
- Shame
- Embarrassment
- Denial or Doubt
- Anger
- Distrust
- Hopelessness
- Loss of control/powerlessness
- Numb or restricted range of feelings
- Hyper-alert
- Detached
- Need to control
- Depression
- Concern with burdening others

PHYSICAL RESPONSES

- Nightmares
- Shaking
- Anxiety/Fear
- Pain
- Headaches
- Sleeplessness
- Exhaustion
- Stomach problems
- Appetite changes
- Sexual fears or problems
- Flashbacks
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Unpleasant memories resurfacing

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

- Lifestyle changes
- Withdrawal from normal daily activities such as work or school
- Avoiding people
- Increasing use of alcohol/drugs
- Refusing to talk about what happened or limiting conversation about the event.
- Denying that the event happened
- Acting like the event was no big deal
- Substance use
- Self destructive behavior
- Resistance to transitions or change
- Protective of personal space
- Sensitive to criticism

Remember!

Every person is unique and may have different reactions after experiencing domestic or sexual violence.