

IMMEDIATE REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Numbness and detachment	Depersonalization (e.g., feeling as if you are watching yourself)
Anxiety or severe fear	Disorientation
Guilt (including survivor guilt)	Feeling out of control
Exhilaration as a result of surviving	Denial
Anger	Constriction of feelings
Sadness	Feeling overwhelmed
Helplessness	
Feeling unreal	

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Nausea and/or gastrointestinal distress	Extreme fatigue or exhaustion
Sweating or shivering	Greater startle responses
Faintness	Depersonalization
Muscle tremors or shaking	
Elevated heartbeat, respiration, and blood pressure	

COGNITIVE REACTIONS

Difficulty concentrating

Rumination or racing thoughts (e.g., replaying the traumatic event over and over again)

Distortion of time and space (e.g., traumatic event may be perceived as if it was happening in slow motion, or a few seconds can be perceived as minutes)

Memory problems (e.g., not being able to recall important aspects of the trauma)

Strong identification with victims

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Startled reaction

Restlessness

Sleep and appetite disturbances

Difficulty expressing oneself

Argumentative behavior

Increased use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco

Withdrawal and apathy

Avoidant behaviors

EXISTENTIAL REACTIONS

Intense use of prayer

Restoration of faith in the goodness of others (e.g., receiving help from others)

Loss of self-efficacy

Despair about humanity, particularly if the event was intentional

Immediate disruption of life assumptions (e.g., fairness, safety, goodness, predictability of life)

DELAYED REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Irritability and/or hostility
 Depression
 Mood swings, instability
 Anxiety (e.g., phobia, generalized anxiety) Fear of trauma recurrence
 Grief reactions
 Shame
 Feelings of fragility and/or vulnerability
 Emotional detachment from anything that requires emotional reactions

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Sleep disturbances, nightmares	Persistent fatigue
Somatization (e.g., increased focus on and worry about body aches and pains)	Elevated cortisol levels
Appetite and digestive changes	Hyperarousal
Lowered resistance to colds and infection	Long-term health effects including heart, liver, autoimmune, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

COGNITIVE REACTIONS

Intrusive memories or flashbacks	Belief that feelings or memories are dangerous
Reactivation of previous traumatic events	Generalization of triggers (e.g., a person who experiences a home invasion during the daytime may avoid being alone during the day)
Self-blame	Suicidal thinking
Preoccupation with event	
Difficulty making decisions	
Belief that certain behaviors, including avoidant behavior, will protect against future trauma	

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Avoidance of event reminders
 Social relationship disturbances
 Decreased activity level
 Engagement in high-risk behaviors
 Increased use of alcohol and drugs
 Withdrawal

EXISTENTIAL REACTIONS

Questioning (e.g., "Why me?")	Hopelessness
Increased cynicism, disillusionment	Reestablishing priorities
Increased self-confidence (e.g., "If I can survive this, I can survive anything")	Redefining meaning and importance of life
Loss of purpose	Reworking life's assumptions to accommodate the trauma (e.g., taking a self-defense class to reestablish a sense of safety)
Renewed faith	