

COMMON REACTIONS

There are certain reactions that people typically experience in response to loss or severe stress. Most reactions, though distressing and upsetting, will pass within a few weeks. This handout is designed to give you some understanding of these typical reactions and some methods to resolve them that have been helpful to others.

Unwanted Thoughts

Intrusive images and thoughts that keep popping back into your mind

- Write down events, thoughts and feelings every day; notice changes in thoughts and reactions over time
- Identify a thought or action that can distract you from an unwanted thought; when the thought appears, switch your attention to the distracting thought or action

Uncomfortable “Nervous” Reactions

Feeling jumpy, easily startled, worried, fearful, irritable, waves of emotions

- Physical exercise or being productive
- Distractions, like hobbies or movies
- Letting the reactions be there and carrying on
- Relaxation exercises
- Deep breathing exercises

Physical Reactions

Difficulty sleeping, change in appetite, aches and pains, tense muscles

- Hot baths, massage, stretching, relaxation and deep breathing exercises
- Exercise, even a 20-30 minute walk will help greatly
- Establish a relaxing routine to bring on sleepiness **BEFORE** getting into bed; if unable to sleep after 10 minutes, get out of bed and find a way to relax again
- Eat regular healthy meals: high fiber and high vitamin foods (fruit, whole grain, vegetables) are best; don't overdo foods high in fat or sugar
- Avoid excessive use of caffeine or alcohol
- If you use medications, use only as directed

Avoidance

Avoidance of places, people, things, etc. that remind you of the loss; avoidance may be a useful way to cope at first; if over utilized, it can delay return to usual functioning

- Reestablish your routines as naturally as possible
- Expect some discomfort as you begin to face what you've been avoiding; it is normal and will pass as you experience success
- Face whatever you've been avoiding in stages; examples are to imagine facing it first, or ask someone to go with you
- If talking is a method of coping that you often use, find someone you trust to talk it out with
- Write about it as you would if you were talking with someone