

How to manage reactions to a traumatic situation

You have experienced an abnormal event that may cause you to experience unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with how you normally function. Now that the event is over, it is possible to feel now or sometime later different emotional or physical reactions. This is very normal.

Some people react immediately but for others a reaction may appear hours or days after a horrible experience. Everyone responds differently. Try and be as flexible as you can, allowing your reactions to be there and supporting yourself to manage them.

The signs and symptoms of stress may last for a short period of time (days) or longer (weeks, months) depending on the severity of the traumatic event. What is very helpful is to seek support from people you are close to. This will help reduce the level of stress and allow any reactions that you may experience to pass more quickly. Occasionally, your experience of an abnormal event can be so painful that you require professional assistance. This only means that in this instance it is hard for you to manage your reactions yourself. It does not mean that you are weak or that you are mad.

You may notice stress reactions affecting your **physical** health. Common manifestations of this are: fatigue, headaches, chest pain, nausea, sweating, dizziness and chills.

You may notice stress reactions affecting your **thinking**. It may be that you are feeling more confused than normal, finding it difficult to concentrate or make decisions. Sometimes your sleep can be affected and your dreams more vivid.

Often it is your **emotional** reaction that is noticeable to you. You may feel anxiety, anger, depression, fear or not be able to control how you feel or express yourself.

The signs and symptoms of stress can affect your **behaviour**. That is how you rest, how you talk to other people, and how you deal with a change in your normal reactions (increased alcohol intake, loss or increase in appetite).

If any of these symptoms are overwhelming always consider arranging an appointment to see your local Doctor. To locate a doctor in your local area, <http://www.hse.ie/portal/eng/services/maps/>

Managing Your Reactions: Some suggestions

- ★ Stick to your normal routine and keep active. Don't forget to rest too.
- ★ Recovery is a process that takes place over time. Don't label yourself as mad or crazy. You are normal and having normal reactions and feelings.
- ★ Be careful of 'bottling up' what's upsetting or worrying you. Talk to trusted others about what is going on for you.
- ★ Give yourself permission to feel awful.
- ★ Eat regularly even if you don't feel like it.
- ★ Be careful of alcohol in the next 24-48 hours as that can interfere with a normal healing process.
- ★ If your sleep or thoughts are troubled, don't fight this. It will decrease over time.
- ★ Writing things down can be very useful in clearing your head and letting go of any symptoms that are bothering you.
- ★ Practice relaxation methods such as muscle relaxation, breathing and mindfulness from www.beaumont.ie/marc or look in the Student Counselling page on www.iadt.ie for further resources.
- ★ If you experience initial stress from practising relaxation, try mixing it up with physical exercise such as swimming, walking, running, kicking a ball - all these activities help to release tension.
- ★ Academically, you may experience more difficulties than normal with concentration and focusing on programme tasks and deadlines. If this is troubling you, talk to the Programme Staff about managing your workload and give yourself time to find your balance. Academic support is available from the Learning Support service and Disability/Wellness Services.

Student Counselling Service, IADT	01 239 4650
Student Health Centre, IADT	01 239 4760
Student Union Welfare Officer (welfare support), IADT	01 239 4646
Learning Support Service (academic support), and Disability/Wellness service	Email: learningsupport@iadt.ie during term time & disabilityservices@iadt.ie
Samaritans 24 hour Telephone Service	116 123 (free call)
Pieta 24 hour Crisis and bereavement support.	1800 247 247 (free call)