

Normal stress reactions can start immediately when disaster hits. These may last for days, weeks, or even longer, and include:

- **Emotional signs:** shock, disbelief, numbness, emptiness, vulnerability, hopelessness, helplessness, self-blame, shame or guilt, anxiety or panic, anger, crying, grief and depression, low self-esteem (asking “Why me?”), feeling overwhelmed and out of control, withdrawal and disinterest in life, work, pleasures, love relationships, regression

to feeling like a child.

- **Intellectual signs:** disorientation to time, place or person, confusion, indecisiveness, suspicion, worry, inability to concentrate, memory loss, repetitive thoughts, disturbing images, repetitive disturbing thoughts, “second guessing” yourself.

- **Physical signs:** tension, twitches, sweating, trouble breathing, weakness, tiredness, nausea, teeth grinding, startle responses, changes in blood pressure, rashes, flared up allergies, constipation or diarrhea, body aches and pains, visual impairment, colds or other illness, feeling “out of sorts” or “not yourself”.

- **Behavior signs:** irritability, edginess, pacing, changes in eating or sleep patterns, “acting out in behavior disturbances, delinquency, domestic violence or addictions to food, sex, alcohol, drugs.

- **Daily Life signs:** discontinuing daily routines or health regimens, problems at work or school, disinterest in usual activities.

- **Interpersonal signs:** distrust, irritability with others, feeling abandoned, changes in communicating, picking fights, becoming over controlling, either withdrawal from relationships or increased desire for intimacy, nurturance and sex.

- **Spiritual crises:** feeling disappointment, confusion or anger at spiritual sources, questioning basic beliefs, loss of meaning and purpose, withdrawal from worship or overly intense practices or rituals, “survivor guilt” that others suffered more heavily.

THE PHASES OF REACTION TO EMOTIONAL TRAUMA:

Grief experts have identified different phases of emotional responses to trauma, that includes the following, although not always in this order:

denial (“this can’t be happening”); bargaining (“if I did this, will it stop?”); anxiety, depression, guilt; anger; and acceptance.

Other models include the following phases:

warning phase; the impact (shock, disbelief);

rescue/heroic phase (when your adrenaline pumps, you feel you are useful);

remedy phase (working with others to heal);

inventory phase (taking stock of the damages);

disillusionment (feeling abandoned, discouraged);

and finally, recovery (acceptance and resuming normal life).