

IT'S O.K. TO RESPOND THAT WAY

*Understanding Normal Stress Responses
For Employees and Family Members*

You've just had a terrible experience. Now you will probably experience some difficult physical and/or emotional responses. This may be happening right now. Many people are fearful that their reactions are unique. Please don't be alarmed. These are normal responses of normal people to a highly abnormal event. It's O.K. to feel that way...

WHAT ARE THE COMMON STRESS RESPONSES?

- Physical changes may include fatigue, headaches, heartburn, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and a loss or increase of appetite.
- Emotional and mental responses include confusion, anxiety, fear, numbness, despair, depression, guilt, anger, grief, withdrawal, and helplessness.
- Poor concentration, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts are all common, normal responses.

WHEN WILL I FEEL THESE THINGS?

- There's a good chance that you are experiencing some of the physical or emotional responses now, even though the event is over.
- Sometimes these responses appear immediately, but with other people, days, weeks, or even months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

HOW LONG WILL THESE REACTIONS LAST?

- The time it takes for emotional wounds to heal varies from person to person. Some events are just too powerful to manage quickly. Much like the flu, grief and anxiety reactions must run their course.
- No one can deny that this is a difficult experience, but it's important to know that things will improve.

WHAT IF I BEGIN TO FEEL WORSE?

- Sometimes the intensity of your response may increase, or the reaction may be very prolonged. Professional assistance from a counselor can help. This does not imply weakness or craziness. It simply means that the particular event was so powerful that it pushed you beyond your normal coping capabilities.

WHAT CAN I DO TO FEEL BETTER?

- The passage of time will help, and talking things out with professionals, peers, or loved ones will help a lot. In fact, it is crucial that you "talk out" your experience. Withdrawal and sealing over can make recovery more difficult.
- You should avoid alcohol and drug consumption. Alcohol is actually a depressant, and like drugs, can prolong the pain of the traumatic event.
- Take good care of yourself by eating healthy foods, exercising within your limits, getting plenty of rest, and staying in touch with people who care.

When it's tough... remember, it's O.K. to feel that way...