



What to Expect After Trauma: Possible Reactions in High School Students

After being exposed to a crisis event (such as a natural disaster, acts of violence, and death of a friend or family member), it is not unusual for teenagers to display symptoms of acute distress, such as shock, crying, anger, confusion, fear, sadness, grief, and pessimism.

You may observe the following in teenagers following exposure to a crisis:

1. Worries, fears, and anxiety about safety of self and others
2. Worries about recurrence or repercussions such as war or school violence
3. Changes in behavior
4. Discomfort with feelings, particularly revenge, but also those of vulnerability
5. Increased risk for substance abuse, including drinking
6. Discussion of events and reviewing of details
7. Negative impact on issues of trust and perceptions of others, particularly those that are “different”
8. Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g. sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
9. Repetitive thoughts and comments about death or dying (including suicidal thoughts)

In addition, at home, parents may see:

1. Changes in sleep or appetite
2. Withdrawal
3. Lack of interest in usual activities (e.g., after-school activities, time with friends)
4. Increased negative behaviors (e.g., defiance) or emotions (e.g., sadness, fears, anger, worries)
5. Hate or anger statements
6. Denial of impact

Signs that Help is Needed:

1. Maladaptive Coping-- potentially harmful coping behaviors, such as drug or alcohol use, severe aggression, statements of suicidal ideation
2. When reactions to crisis are interfering with daily functioning and are long lasting

Note. Adapted from School Crisis Prevention and Intervention: The PREPaRE Model, by S. E. Brock et al., 2009, Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. Adapted with permission.