



# Do you need counseling after a tragedy?

## Normal reactions to traumatic events

It is important to help people recognize that stress is a normal reaction to tragedy. Mild to moderate stress reactions are common in people who have experienced or witnessed dangerous situations. Some may experience feeling shock, anger, guilt, helplessness, tiredness, distrust, etc. Although stress reactions may seem 'extreme' at times, they generally do not become chronic problems. Most people recover fully from even moderate stress reactions within 6 to 16 months.

In fact, resilience, the ability to recover, is a common outcome after tragedies. Although many survivors of tragedies experienced emotional distress, others learned that they could handle crises effectively, and felt that they were better off for having met the challenge. Tragedy may also bring a community closer together or direct a person to new priorities, goals, and values. Instead of post-traumatic stress, the situation produces post-traumatic “growth.”

## Problematic stress responses

Less common are problematic responses. Individuals may need assistance from a medical or mental-health professional when they experience:

- Severe dissociation (feeling as if the world is unreal, not feeling connected to one's own body, losing one's sense of identity or taking on a new identity, amnesia)
- Severe intrusive re-experiencing (flashbacks, terrifying memories or nightmares, repetitive automatic reenactment)
- Extreme avoidance (extreme social or vocational withdrawal, compulsive avoidance)
- Severe hyper-arousal (panic episodes, terrifying nightmares, difficulty controlling violent impulses, inability to concentrate)
- Debilitating anxiety (extreme worry, severe phobias, unshakeable obsessions, paralyzing nervousness, fear of losing control/going crazy)
- Severe depression (lack of pleasure in life, feelings of worthlessness, self-blame, dependency, hopelessness)
- Problematic substance use (abuse or dependency, self-medication)
- Psychotic symptoms (delusions, hallucinations, bizarre thoughts or images)

If you or a loved one needs help coping with tragedy, please contact Capital Area Human Services:

Adults 225-925-1906

Children 225-922-0445

[www.realhelpbr.com](http://www.realhelpbr.com)

Louisiana Office of Behavioral Health 24-hour Crisis Counselor 866-310-7977

## CAPITAL AREA HUMAN SERVICES

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