

Dear UFV Students,

After a distressing event, whether a natural disaster or something that occurs in class, work or outside of UFV, people have a few common reactions. These reactions may take days or weeks to surface, and for some people, the reactions may not come up at all. Stress responses are unique to each person.

As you experience a distressing event or receive traumatic news, it's typical to feel shock and/or denial in the first 24 to 72 hours:

- **Shock and denial** are responses to sudden distressing events, especially shortly after the event. Both shock and denial are normal protective reactions.
- **Shock** is a sudden and often intense disturbance of your emotional state that may leave you feeling stunned or dazed.
- **Denial** involves not acknowledging that something very stressful has happened, or not experiencing fully the intensity of the event. You may temporarily feel numb or disconnected from life.

As the initial shock subsides (24 to 72 hours), reactions vary from one person to another. The following, however, are all normal responses to a distressing or traumatic event:

- **Feelings become intense and sometimes are unpredictable.** You may become more irritable than usual, and your mood may change back and forth dramatically. You might feel anxious or depressed.
- **Thoughts and behavior patterns.** You might have repeated and vivid memories of the event. These flashbacks may occur for no apparent reason and may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating. You may find it difficult to concentrate, make decisions, and/or become more easily confused. Sleep and eating patterns also may be disrupted.
- **Interpersonal relationships often become strained.** Greater conflict, such as more frequent arguments with family members and friends, is common. On the other hand, you might become withdrawn and isolated and avoid your usual activities.
- **Physical symptoms may accompany this kind of stress.** For example, headaches, nausea, and chest pain may appear. Pre-existing medical conditions may also worsen due to the stress.

Some helpful ways to care for oneself during and after a critical incident are:

- Lots of **gentleness, patience, and self-compassion** for whatever your response looks like. There is no wrong way to navigate your emotions in relation to a traumatic event.
- **Social connection.** Spend time engaging with friends, family, and peers. Connect with people you care about, balancing with time spent alone. Both are necessary in the process of recovering from an event.
- Get lots of **rest.** Your body and mind need rest to restore your internal systems to their pre-event state and this takes energy. Allow yourself to rest, take naps, and do low impact exercise (i.e. walking, or light stretching) to help your mind and body heal.
- Try to **maintain a regular schedule.** As much as possible, try to prepare and eat regular meals at regular times, go to bed at your normal hour, and begin your day as you did before.

Should you experience these reactions and want to talk about them with a Counsellor, please contact our Student Services front desk for an appointment.

Take care of yourselves and each other, and please do not hesitate to contact the Counselling Department if you need some support or would like to talk, ~ **Your UFV Counsellors**

Common Responses to a Traumatic Event: can last from a few days to a few weeks

Cognitive	Emotional	Physical	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor concentration • confusion • disorientation • feeling 'foggy' • shortened attention span • memory loss • unwanted memories • difficulty making decisions • rethinking last contact with person • difficulty studying • racing thoughts • difficulty following classroom activities or lectures • suicidality • denial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shock • numbness • feeling overwhelmed • sadness/grief • depression • feeling lost • fear of harm to self and/or loved ones • feeling nothing • feeling abandoned • uncertainty of feelings • volatile emotions • guilt • anger • shame • misplaced responsibility • suicidality • irritability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nausea • lightheadedness • dizziness • gastro-intestinal problems • rapid heart rate • tremors • headaches • grinding teeth • fatigue • poor sleep • pain • hyperarousal • jumpiness • increase or decrease in appetite • muscle aches • rapid/shallow breathing • tingling/cold in hands/feet • sweating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suspicion • arguments with friends and loved ones • withdrawal • excessive silence • inappropriate humor • increased/decreased eating • change in sexual desire or functioning • increased smoking • increased substance use or abuse • change in daily habits • avoidance of places which remind of trauma • social avoidance • school avoidance