



Harbor

TRAUMA INFORMED CARE FACT SHEET

If you have experienced a traumatic event (an injury, abuse, loss of a loved one or property, witnessing violence or a serious threat, victim of a crime or natural disaster, or any overwhelming emotional experience), you may be experiencing some strong reactions. This is very common, and it is, in fact, quite normal for people to experience aftershocks when they have passed through a traumatizing life event.

Trauma refers to experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them feeling powerless. It refers to both the event and an individual's response to it. No one is immune to the impact of trauma. It affects the individual, families, and communities by disrupting healthy development, adversely affecting relationships, and contributing to a variety of mental health issues.

Trauma informed care incorporates an awareness of the impact of traumatic stress on ill or injured patients as part of treating the medical aspects of the trauma.

PROVIDING PATIENT CENTERED CARE AND TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

Trauma can be both a medical and psychological event in the eyes of patients and families experiencing serious illnesses, injuries, or painful procedures. By integrating an understanding of traumatic stress into their routine interactions with patients and families, health care providers can:

- Reduce the impact of difficult or frightening medical events, and
- Help patients and families cope with emotional reactions to illness and injury

Traumatic stress reactions, left unaddressed, can have serious implications for medical treatment and health outcomes and can represent a "hidden cost" to the health care system. Traumatic stress symptoms have been associated with:

- Adverse health outcomes
- Poorer treatment and medication adherence
- Worse functional outcomes

STRESS REACTIONS

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks, or stress reactions, appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months. Depending on the severity of the traumatic event, these may last much longer. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions may pass more quickly. Sometimes the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply weakness, it simply indicates that the particular traumatic event was too powerful for the person to manage on his/her own.

Here are some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction in a traumatized person:

PHYSICAL*

- Chills, profuse sweating
- Nausea, vomiting
- Fainting, dizziness
- Weakness, fatigue
- Change in appetite
- Non-specific bodily complaints
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Elevated BP
- Rapid heart rate
- Muscle tremors

**Any of these physical symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.*

COGNITIVE

- Confusion, disorientation x 3
- Nightmares, intrusive images
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating

EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Panic, anxiety
- Denial
- Agitation, irritability
- Depression
- Intense anger
- Emotional shock
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loss of emotional control
- Inappropriate emotions
- Emotional numbing
- Withdrawal, antisocial acts
- Restlessness, insomnia
- Erratic movements
- Change in social activity
- Change in speech patterns or usual communication
- Substance use
- Crisis of faith

Symptoms can last longer than four-six weeks and you may need professional counseling. Contact a Trauma Informed Care mental health professional (psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker) at Harbor for assistance, 419-475-4449.