

Common Reactions Following a Tragic Event

The First Few Hours

It is important to realize as a helper that everyone reacts differently to tragic events. An individual's reaction will be affected by a number of factors including the survivor's personal life; the survivor's physical and mental health; the suddenness of the tragic event; and the timing of the tragic event. However, there are reactions to tragic events which are common and which you are likely to see when helping a survivor. These reactions include . . .

- Shock and disbelief
- Guilt
- Anger/blaming
- Numbness
- Denial of the enormity of the event
- Confusion
- Paralysis . . . inability to make decisions
- Helplessness
- Fear
- Urgent need for information

Implications for Helpers

- If you hear the survivor saying something like "*what is the matter with me*", you can say "*what you are experiencing is very normal under these circumstances*".
- If you hear one survivor judging how another survivor is reacting, you can say "*everyone grieves differently*".