Reactions to Stressful Events

Most people have some reaction to a stressful event, such as the death or near death of a friend, classmate, or acquaintance; being physically or sexually abused; or other overwhelming situations.

These experiences may affect your ability to function and take care of yourself. Everyone’s reaction is different and based on personal experiences. It may take a while to have a reaction, and sometimes you may not feel a reaction at all. People often don’t realize they are reacting. Sometimes feelings are triggered by having something similar happen at a later time.

**Common reactions**
- Fatigue
- Feeling anxious
- Nightmares
- Sadness
- Trouble Concentrating
- Apprehension
- Anger
- Increased risk-taking
- Change in appetite (too much or too little)
- Sleep changes (too much or too little)
- Increase use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawal
- Headaches
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability
- Feeling numb
- Replaying event over and over in your head
- Stomach problems/aches

**What Can I do to feel better?**
- Get adequate sleep (9-10 hours)
- Spend time doing something you enjoy
- Exercise daily
- Eat healthy and drink plenty of water
- Work on projects/tasks that you can start and finish in one day
- Talk with someone supportive
- Engage in relaxing activities

**When do I need additional help?**
- When you’re unable to function normally for weeks or months after the event(s)
- When you are not taking good care of yourself
- When you have a friend or co-worker who is not getting better
- When you feel like the reactions are running your life
- When you feel overwhelmed or out of control

Talk with your doctor or contact the Employee Assistance Program for support and resources.
What to Expect in Counseling

Why Now?
Before seeing a counselor, give thought to what is going on in your life right now that counseling can help with. Have a clear goal or objective in mind. What you’d you like to see different or change?

Kick The Tires
Not all counselors are the same. Counselors differ in approach, licensure, personality, and specialties. Do you have preferences? Male versus female, older vs. younger, ethnicity, LGBTQ friendly, faith based or ease of office location are all factors to consider.

Would you benefit from a counselor that assigns tasks, homework, reading between appointments? Most counselors have a website that offers client’s information about them personally and professionally. In addition, most welcome a phone call as an opportunity to learn about them. Seek advice from trusted individuals that have had counseling.

The First Appointment
There will not be sweeping results from your first visit. There will likely not be a “eureka” moment and chances are you won’t feel significantly better. Don’t be discouraged!

Much time is spent filling out new client paperwork. There will likely be many questions about your life up to this point as well as questions about your family, employment history and personal history.

The counselor will explore current symptoms and how you are functioning on a daily basis. The therapist may ask about your sleeping/eating habits, mood, ability to focus and concentrate.

This information gathering may be difficult to discuss, hard to bring up or feel like a waste of time but it is essential in helping the therapist fully understand your concern(s) and develop a plan to help you.

Before the end of the initial appointment, your counselor will likely review frequency of future appointments and identify after hours support (e.g. on-call availability, emergency resources).

The Second Visit and Beyond
Expect the real work to begin at session 2-3. Goals and objectives have been identified and discussed.

Your participation in counseling matters. Counseling is not a bystander sport. It’s an interactive process where your questions, thoughts and willingness to be open leads to progress.

Be honest and ask questions. Telling the counselor what you think she/he wants to hear won’t help you in the long run. If there is something you don’t understand don’t be afraid to ask for clarification or for another explanation. Make an honest effort to hear your counselors feedback. Good therapists understand that positive change happens with the right proportions of support AND challenge.

Do I Have A Drinking Problem?
As the City of Milwaukee Employee Assistance Coordinator, this is a question I’m frequently asked. My answer is usually, “Well, has it caused you a problem?”

Has your drinking led to a problem at home, at work, in meeting a responsibility or legal issue? If yes, then there is a good chance it’s a problem. This does not mean you are addicted or an alcoholic. However, if problem drinking is not addressed, it may very well develop into an addiction.

The CAGE assessment tool is often used to screen for addiction. It is not intended to be a final diagnosis or stand in place of a full assessment by an addictions professional. However, it does offer feedback about your alcohol use:

1. Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking? Yes/No.
2. Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking? Yes/No
3. Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking? Yes/No
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to calm your nerves or get rid of a hangover? Yes/No.

To score assign 1 point to “Yes” responses. A total score of 1 is worth a more thorough evaluation. It would be helpful to discuss with your doctor or health professional. Scores of 3-4 are serious and strong indicators of addiction.
Managing a Workgroup Under Pressure

Managing a work group under pressure to produce, meet a deadline or complete a project is challenging. Such demands have the potential to tax even the most efficient work team. As a manager, your ability to recognize changes in your direct reports, maintain a positive attitude, encourage positive coping strategies, offer support, and set realistic demands increases the odds of your work team rising to the occasion.

**Recognizing Changes**
As a manager, this means keeping your eyes and ears open. It entails knowing when your employee’s mood and behavior isn’t typical. Be mindful of sudden changes in productivity, presentism, irritability, sick leave, team work and overall morale. These early warning signs help address issues early on and before they become a crisis.

**Maintain a Positive Attitude**
Be a source of encouragement. Acknowledge hard work and challenges while expressing confidence in the team. Resist leading off with unconstructive criticism. Often times, this type of motivation backfires by leaving employees second guessing themselves. Keep your composure and model positive behavior. When it hits the fan, employees will be looking to you in how they will respond.

**Encourage Healthy Supportive Resources and Strategies**
Become familiar with City wellness resources and make it a habit to keep employees informed during meetings/departmental announcements. Get to know and support your department’s Wellness Champion. If your department does not have a Wellness Champion, contact Workforce Health about how to establish one.

Encourage employees to take their lunch and scheduled breaks. A study by BUSINESS WIRE, May 7, 2014, reported that one in five employee respondents said guilt was the reason they don’t step away from their workspaces. This is problematic because taking breaks at work boosts performance. Stepping away from work allows us to replenish the mental stamina needed to sustain focus and attention. However, not all breaks are the same. A key component of an effective break is one that allows time for psychological detachment. It means putting away thoughts of work and shifting our focus, preferably to something positive or relaxing.

**Communicate**
Nothing destroys positive work morale as efficiently and completely as poor communication. Counter intuitively, effective communication starts with listening...not talking. Be non-defensive and receptive to hear differing perspectives, opinions, solutions and problems. Help employees feel listened to by paraphrasing, putting in your own words what you hear and understand.

Get ahead of rumors by quickly delivering information about procedures, deadlines or other departmental changes. It is okay to not know the answer to every detail about a change. In situations where not everything is known, share what is known and when the team may expect further information. This approach is better than keeping employees completely in the dark because it instills confidence in you as a manager.

**Set Realistic Expectations**
The saying, “Rome wasn’t built in day” holds true. Engage your team in breaking-up large projects into smaller ones. Divide and conquer. Identify smaller objectives/steps to build momentum, create “wins” and maintain morale.

Strategy is key. Clearly identify and verbalize your priorities. Be willing to place less pressing tasks on the back burner. Everything can’t be a high priority all at the same time. Help assign a percentage of work time to tasks based on priority. It may be helpful to attack tasks with a fixed deadline first, because these are usually dictated by someone else.

Managing a work team under pressure is challenging. The tips above may help you and your team not just whether the storm and rise to the occasion.
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**Road Rage**

An article by DriversEd.com published in March, 2018 reported that 53% of drivers consider driving 10 mph over the speed limit perfectly normal. Couple this stat with the fact that 50% of drivers that are the victims of someone else’s bad driving habits respond in anger. In other words, half of all drivers admit to horn-honking, light-flashing, rude gestures, shouting, and aggressive driving after another driver has angered them.

Being in a bad mood or running late for an appointment quickly increases the potential for reacting with rage to another driver’s mistakes.

**Prevention**

Take preventative measures before getting behind the wheel. Remind yourself that no one is perfect, we all make driving mistakes sometimes and being late to an appointment isn’t necessarily the end of the world. Drive defensively. Keep space between you and other vehicles.

**Diffuse**

If someone is acting out their frustration, be the bigger person and don’t escalate the situation. Take a deep breath and allow plenty of room for them to pass you. If you made a driving mistake, own it by waving and mouthing “sorry.” DriversEd.com noted that 37% of road rage incidents involve at least one firearm. Be safe, make it home, and remember to keep a good headspace when driving.

**Managing Stress**

- **Pressure Point to Reset.** Finger pressure is a Naam Yoga technique that some find calming and relaxing. Basically, you can “reset” yourself by applying pressure to a point on your middle finger, between your second and third knuckles and near where your finger and hand meet.

- **Listening to Calming Music.** A 2002 study published in the Journal of Evidence Based Nursing showed how calming music decreases blood pressure, heart rate and perceived stress.

- **Chewing Gum (sugar-free).** Chewing gum is associated with reduced anxiety and lower cortisol (stress hormone) levels, increased alertness and concentration. (Physiology & Behavior, 2009).

**City of Milwaukee Events and Reminders**

- **Not feeling well?** Visit the [Workplace Clinic](841 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202 (Zeidler Municipal Building) for FREE onsite healthcare services. Call 414-777-3413 for information or to schedule an appointment.

- **Free screening, consultation, and education services to prevent and treat potential musculoskeletal injuries.** Schedule an appointment with a physical therapist at the [Injury Prevention Clinic](. Call 414-777-3413 to schedule an appointment.

- **Health4Me™** is a UnitedHealthcare (UHC) mobile app that provides instant access to your family’s critical health information, anytime/anywhere. Find a physician, check the status of a claim or speak directly with a healthcare professional.