

**CRISIS AFFECTS THE WHOLE PERSON:  
SOME COMMON RESPONSES TO EXTREME STRESS**

**COGNITIVE**

Memory impairment  
Slowed thought processes  
Difficulty making decisions  
Difficulty solving problems  
Difficulty concentrating  
Difficulty calculating  
Limited attention span

**BEHAVIORAL**

Change in behavior  
Withdrawal  
Silence/talkativeness  
Under/overeating  
Under/over sleeping  
Lack of interest in usually satisfying activities  
Over interest in anything that Distracts

**EMOTIONAL**

Anxiety, fear, joy, loneliness, anger, confusion, guilt  
Irritability  
Depression – hopelessness, helplessness  
Overwhelmed  
Numb

**PHYSICAL**

Fatigue that sleep does not alleviate  
Flare-up of old medical problems  
Headaches  
Muscle &/or joint discomfort  
Digestive problems

**SPIRITUAL**

Changes in relationships with family members  
Changes in relationships with friends  
Changes in relationships with co-workers  
Changes in relationship with self  
Questioning of beliefs, values  
Re-evaluation of life structure

All of the above can be considered normal reactions to a crisis if:

- The reactions do not endanger the individual or others **and**
- The reactions begin to diminish after about 24 hours

All of the above reactions are typically responsive to appropriate intervention. People of all ages who are given an opportunity to explore and understand the crisis event and its meaning and to receive information about typical recovery from crisis recover more rapidly with less lasting trauma than people whose pain is ignored.

Therefore, in responding to a crisis, one of the first concerns is to provide support to those at higher risk of severe reactions. People at highest risk include the following:

- People exposed to physical danger, emotional intensity of police action, excessive media interest in their situation, and/or trauma of children
- People who have been physically or emotionally close to a victim of violence, disaster, accident, injury or death
- People who identify with a victim because of similar characteristics, similar status, or similar history
- People who have unresolved grief or are still healing from previous psychological trauma
- People whose physical and/or mental health is compromised for other reasons

Over the weeks and months following a crisis it is essential that student services personnel follow up with those who were deemed to be a high risk and that they be alert for those who experience delayed reactions. Some people's defenses are almost certain to prevent them from processing an event immediately. Often such people experience emotional blocks that prevent them from connecting their reactions to the event. Follow-up contacts are essential to monitor the progress of these individuals.