

Normal Emotional Responses Following an Adverse Event

AM I HAVING A NORMAL RESPONSE?

Individuals will experience a range of emotions following an adverse event. Some people may have little or no distress or disruption. Others may be completely overwhelmed and need time away from work. Initial emotional responses in the hours and days after an adverse event are not predictive of long-term outcomes. Try not to pathologize initial responses.

Common reactions to adverse events include:



Shock

Disbelief it has occurred, unable to consolidate the experience, or feeling numb



Fear

Feeling anxious and concerned about the event, worry that their career has ended, or doubting clinical skills and knowledge



Anxious

Concerned about returning to work, legal ramifications, personal vulnerability, or feeling panicked



Anger

Outrage at others, the situation, the system, or feelings of injustice



Powerlessness

Feeling helpless as to how to change the situation or gain control



Shame or Guilt

Professional credibility concerns, worried how you're perceived by the wider team, or threat to personal identity



Sadness

This may be a loss and grief event across many domains – personal, work, identity, or sadness for the patient and their family

All these symptoms are associated with acute critical stress and are very normal reactions to an abnormal event. Level of distress will be influenced by several factors – level of harm to a patient/colleague, previous experiences of loss, grief and trauma, the strength of an individual’s support network, stage of career, and more.

Additional common symptoms following an adverse event:

- Sleep disturbances
- Intrusive thoughts or memories – reliving or having flashbacks to the event
- Social withdrawal – not wanting to engage with others
- Difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms may include headaches, nausea, restlessness and irritability, diarrhea or constipation, change in appetite (comfort eating or loss of appetite), fatigue, heart palpitations, or strong startle reflex

WILL I RECOVER?

Adverse events are a distressing and challenging reality for healthcare workers, but most individuals recover. It’s important to know that despite feeling crippled by emotions and fear in the early days, the majority of healthcare workers do recover and resume full capacity work.

WHAT IF I (OR SOMEONE ON MY TEAM) IS REALLY STRUGGLING?

There are resources available and there is **no shame in asking for help**.

Optum – Cooper’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP): Optum provides free, confidential short-term counseling and coaching services for a wide range of problems. Free & Confidential, 24/7. Call 1-800-972-8976 to speak to a Navigation Specialist.

Behavioral Health Benefits Covered 100% In-Network: The Core and Standard PPO medical plan options cover behavioral health and substance abuse services at 100% in-network (across Tier 1 & Tier 2). Visit www.psychologytoday.com/us to explore providers based on a variety of factors.

Debriefings, Group, and Peer Support: The C.A.R.E. Program provides evidence-based support to teams to support emotional well-being. If you think your team would benefit from a group, you can request one at <https://wellness.cooperhealth.org/>. Information about peer support can also be found on the website.

Local & National Resources

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) (free, 24/7): 9-8-8
- [NJ Suicide Prevention Hopeline](#) (free, 24/7): 1-855-654-6735 |Text “NJ” to 741741
- [SAMHSA’s National Helpline](#) (free, 24/7 support): 1-800-622-HELP (4357)
- [National Parent & Youth Helpline](#) (free, 24/7 support): 1-855-427-2736

**Compassion and Resiliency
Experience (C.A.R.E.) Program**



Find additional well-being resources at: <https://wellness.cooperhealth.org/>