



When Difficult Things Happen

There is a wide range of natural and expected feelings and experiences during and following a traumatic or adverse event. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and the recovery process takes time and intention. Some reactions occur immediately during the event, while other reactions may occur over time, as you can process what happened and have time to reflect on the impact of the event. Remember, as we are all unique, others may be healing at a different pace and in a different way than you.

A traumatic or adverse event are events that disrupt our safety, often they are unexpected, intense, and abnormally stressful experiences. They overwhelm our usual effective coping mechanisms and are shocking: “too much, too fast, too soon.” Depending on the event, you may also be grieving a loss.

During an ongoing traumatic or adverse event, there is a sense of future threat, combined with an absence of protection with exposure to danger, as well as the unknown about when the threat is going to end. This can lead to a sense of vulnerability, heightened alertness, a sense of helplessness and loss of control.

If you are involved in helping others through the event, your own reaction may be heightened as you witness how the event is impacting others. You also may find that your own personal reaction is delayed, as your initial focus is on helping others and completing immediate practical tasks that require your attention.

During and Following an Adverse or Traumatic Event	
Common Reactions (*this list is not exhaustive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion, disorientation, worry, overwhelm, fear, intrusive thoughts and images, heightened alert, self-blame • Shock, sorrow, grief, fear, anger, numbness, irritability, guilt, shame, helplessness • Rumination or replaying the event repeatedly • Isolation, interpersonal conflict, feeling weary and exhausted • Fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, stomach upset, increased heart rate, feeling on edge, feeling wired and tired • Difficulty sleeping, eating, focusing, remembering details
Helpful Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give yourself permission to feel whatever you feel • Connect with caring community • Focus on something practical that you can do right now • Engage in activities that help you ground in your body and in the present moment • Recognize your limits • Practice relaxation methods • Prioritize sleep, remembering to hydrate, and eating nourishing foods • Maintain as normal of a schedule as you are able

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find places where your experiences are heard and validated • Reach out for support through counseling (contact HealthPoint EAP)
Promoting Growth During and After a Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus first on re-establishing a sense of physical, psychological, and emotional safety. • Allow yourself to include your full range of emotional responses as they arise. Don't talk yourself out of a feeling. Try to name what you feel (e.g. outraged, scared, bewildered, overwhelmed, etc.) and listen for what the need underneath might be asking for. Is there a need to feel? To act? To connect? For comfort? For distraction? Needs can change daily. Explore how this need might be met. • Produce a narrative authentic to you and your experience about the events to understand your experience. Having the words to understand and articulate your experiences is powerful. Confusion related to your internal experience may increase feelings of distress, helplessness, and hopelessness. • Engage in self-care that is empowering and protective. Understanding your own experience will also help you be intentional about your self-care practices. Engaging in self-care can range from limiting your social media use to avoid triggers to engaging in activities that will increase feelings of empowerment. Whatever you choose, remember to be mindful of the function that it serves and be kind and compassionate towards yourself as you figure out what you need. • Connect with caring community to process feelings and experiences. Ask for what you need. Often people are afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing but are relieved if you can tell them what is helpful for you. • Take control of what you can control, such as what you want to share with others about your experience. You don't have to repeat your experiences with everyone. Be prepared to say, "I need to not talk about this right now." Respect that everyone needs to deal with things in their own way and own time. • Act in ways that benefit or simply express gratitude and show compassion to others. • Reconnect with your values and make choices that are aligned with what matters to you the most. • Look for personal and shared missions that energize you and help you find meaning.

Responses That Can Lead to Greater Suffering

Please reach out if you become aware of any of the following:

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Working too much
- Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the traumatic experience

- Violence or conflict
- Not taking care of themselves

The *HealthPoint* Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselors have experience in crisis intervention, stress and trauma response, grief and loss, and resilience. The following are some ways that we might be able to support:

- **Individual Counseling:** These are opportunities for individuals to meet with an EAP counselor. Meetings with the EAP are free and confidential, voluntary and are not mandated. These sessions are focused on crisis intervention, safety, resilience, and the impact of the crisis on work.
- **Consultation with Leaders:** EAP counselors connect with leaders to assess current needs, recommend a plan for organizational and individualized support, and provide leaders with information about services and ongoing resources.
- **Group Support Meetings:** While group meetings facilitated by an EAP counselor may be useful, these require coordination and a cooperative effort to create the time, place, and necessary communication. The plan to offer a group meeting will take into consideration operational demands and routines and the risk of additional exposure to trauma.

To set up an appointment call 512-471-3366 or email eap@austin.utexas.edu Monday through Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm.

For a mental health crisis after hours, call 512-471-3399 to speak to a telephone counselor. EAP staff will follow up the following business day.

To discuss concerns about a specific employee, contact the EAP at 512-471-3366 or eap@austin.utexas.edu or call BCAL at 512-232-5050.