

## COMMON REACTIONS

There are certain reactions that people typically experience in response to loss or severe stress. Most reactions, though distressing and upsetting, will pass within a few weeks. This handout is designed to give you some understanding of these typical reactions and some methods to resolve them that have been helpful to others.

### **Unwanted Thoughts**

*Intrusive images and thoughts that keep popping back into your mind*

- Write down events, thoughts and feelings every day; notice changes in thoughts and reactions over time
- Identify a thought or action that can distract you from an unwanted thought; when the thought appears, switch your attention to the distracting thought or action

### **Uncomfortable “Nervous” Reactions**

*Feeling jumpy, easily startled, worried, fearful, irritable, waves of emotions*

- Physical exercise or being productive
- Distractions, like hobbies or movies
- Letting the reactions be there and carrying on
- Relaxation exercises
- Deep breathing exercises

### **Physical Reactions**

*Difficulty sleeping, change in appetite, aches and pains, tense muscles*

- Hot baths, massage, stretching, relaxation and deep breathing exercises
- Exercise, even a 20-30 minute walk will help greatly
- Establish a relaxing routine to bring on sleepiness **BEFORE** getting into bed; if unable to sleep after 10 minutes, get out of bed and find a way to relax again
- Eat regular healthy meals: high fiber and high vitamin foods (fruit, whole grain, vegetables) are best; don't overdo foods high in fat or sugar
- Avoid excessive use of caffeine or alcohol
- If you use medications, use only as directed

### **Avoidance**

**Avoidance of places, people, things, etc. that remind you of the loss; avoidance may be a useful way to cope at first; if over utilized, it can delay return to usual functioning**

- Reestablish your routines as naturally as possible
- Expect some discomfort as you begin to face what you've been avoiding; it is normal and will pass as you experience success
- Face whatever you've been avoiding in stages; examples are to imagine facing it first, or ask someone to go with you
- If talking is a method of coping that you often use, find someone you trust to talk it out with
- Write about it as you would if you were talking with someone