

# When Bad Things Happen...

Prepared by the Seattle Pacific University People Response Team

Based on information from "Psychological First Aid" [www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/manuals/manual-pdf/pfa/PFA\\_V2.pdf](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/manuals/manual-pdf/pfa/PFA_V2.pdf)  
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When a personal or community disaster strikes, individuals will experience a wide range of responses. Sometimes these responses can be surprising or confusing, stirring up unexpected reactions within us and in our relationships with others. In this short document, we will introduce you to the range of normal responses to a crisis, and give you important information about how to move through this season of life in a healthy way.

## Normal reactions to a crisis fall on a spectrum:

From common responses → To more helpful responses

<b>Cognitive</b>	Confusion, disorientation, worry, intrusive or disturbing thoughts and images, self-blame	Determination, resolve, sharper perception, courage, optimism, faith
<b>Emotional</b>	Shock, sorrow, grief, sadness, fear, anger, numbness, irritability, guilt, shame	Feeling involved, challenged, mobilized
<b>Social</b>	Extreme withdrawal, conflict with others	Social connectedness, desire to help others
<b>Physiological</b>	Fatigue, headache, muscle tension, stomach ache, increased heart rate, exaggerated startle response, difficulty sleeping	Alertness, readiness to respond, increased energy

## Actions you can take to move in a more helpful direction:

- \* Focus on one practical way that you can manage your current situation better right now
- \* Spend time talking with a trusted friend, family member, mentor, or spiritual leader
- \* Spend time in prayer
- \* Engage in pleasant and distracting activities such as sports, hobbies, or reading
- \* Develop a schedule that includes adequate rest, healthy foods, and moderate exercise
- \* Use relaxation methods like breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, and music
- \* Use a journal to record your thoughts and feelings
- \* Consult with a medical provider about medical issues you are experiencing
- \* Talk with a professional counselor, or participate in a support group

## Things to avoid (these can prevent you from moving forward in a helpful way):

- \* Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- \* Extreme withdrawal from family and friends
- \* Overeating, or failing to eat
- \* Working too much
- \* Worrying too much about being a burden to others, or thinking they don't care
- \* Extreme avoidance of all thoughts or talk about the event or death of a loved one
- \* Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking normal precautions)
- \* Waiting until you are too stressed or exhausted to benefit from the help of others
- \* Violence, conflict, or blaming others
- \* Not taking care of yourself
- \* Excessive TV or video games
- \* Withdrawing from pleasant activities

## Giving support to others who have been affected by a crisis:

- \* Understand that some people may need to talk, and some may just need a calm presence
- \* Find a quiet and uninterrupted place to talk, and give them your attention
- \* Pay close attention to the specific needs of this person – ask them what would be helpful
- \* Listen to what they are experiencing, and help to show them that their response is normal
- \* Acknowledge that this type of stress takes time to resolve – it is not a quick fix
- \* Acknowledge the pain that they are experiencing, without rushing to say that it will all be OK
- \* Avoid giving advice from your own personal experiences without understanding their story
- \* Talk through the steps that can be taken to move in a helpful direction, and make a plan
- \* Enlist the help of others in your social circle so that you all take part in supporting this person
- \* Let them know that avoiding or withdrawing can increase the overall distress
- \* Encourage them to seek professional support from a counselor, clergy, or medical provider, and offer to accompany them

## Community resources – where to go for additional help:

- \* Students living in campus housing may wish to talk with their **PA, SMC, or RLC**.
- \* Campus pastors in **University Ministries** are available to meet with students, staff, or faculty.  
Contact University Ministries: (206) 281-2966 [um@spu.edu](mailto:um@spu.edu)
- \* Staff members in the **Office of Student Life** are available to meet with students.  
Contact Student Life: (206) 281-2481 [spu.edu/studentlife](http://spu.edu/studentlife)
- \* Staff and faculty members in crisis can talk to their **supervisor, department chair, or dean**.
- \* Most SPU employees have access to counseling and other crisis support benefits through the Employee Assistance Program, managed by the **Office of Human Resources**.  
Contact Human Resources: (206) 281-2809 [spu.edu/depts/hr/benefits/EAP.htm](http://spu.edu/depts/hr/benefits/EAP.htm)
- \* The SPU **Student Counseling Center** offers a wide range of services at no cost to current undergraduate students. Professional therapists and dietitians are available for individual and group counseling, consultation, and referral to other service providers in the Seattle area. The SCC also maintains a website of mental-health and community service providers at [spu.edu/depts/scc/resources.asp](http://spu.edu/depts/scc/resources.asp)  
Contact the SPU Counseling Center: (206) 281-2657 [scc@spu.edu](mailto:scc@spu.edu)

For immediate health-related emergencies, call 911 or SPU Campus Security at (206) 281-2911.  
For a mental-health crisis, call the Crisis Clinic 24-hour crisis line at (206) 461-3222.