

Responding in the face of trauma

You may have been exposed to trauma if you or anyone you know participated in the march to parliament or were involved in incidents where students clashed with security forces. A person may be affected by trauma either directly i.e. where you were directly involved in incidents or indirectly i.e. where you witnessed others being involved or because someone you know and or care about was involved. If you have been exposed, you may experience the physical, emotional or psychological effects of trauma.

Physical symptoms of trauma

- Nausea
- Body aches
- Changes in appetite
- Changes in bowel movements
- Headaches

Psychological symptoms

- Reliving the event /s through flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Avoiding anything associated with the event/s
- Gaps in memory
- Hypervigilance i.e. always being alert for danger
- Problems with concentration

Emotional symptoms

- Irritability/anger
- Sadness/distress
- Guilt
- Feeling detached or numb
- Feeling the need to isolate/withdraw
- Anxiety/feeling panicky

If you are experiencing any of the above remember that you are reacting NORMALLY to abnormal events. You are NOT LOSING your mind.

Some tips for coping:

- Get as much support as you can- consider seeing a counsellor
- Talk to your loved ones, friends and family about how you feel
- Exercise is a good way of dealing with any feelings of anxiety
- Try to keep as much of your usual routine as possible
- Do things that you enjoy and which relax you
- Try not get too preoccupied with flashbacks and distract yourself if you cannot stop thinking about the event
- Be aware of consuming too much alcohol or other substances.
- Try to get as much sleep as possible
- Eat small and regular meals if you struggle with decreased appetite
- Be aware of comfort eating and try to eat as healthily as possible
- Do not make any major, life changing decisions but continue to make necessary decisions.
Making necessary decisions will make you feel more in control.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN SEEING A COUNSELLOR AT UCT CONTACT FATIMA WILLIAMS at Fatima.williams@uct.ac.za or DEBBIE KAMINER at Debbie.kaminer@uct.ac.za or alternately contact The Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture on 021 465-7373