

# We have all been impacted by the Beirut Explosion

An explosion is a sudden, loud, and tremendously fierce event. People who live through an explosion are expected to experience acute stress reaction, in addition to other possible drastic impacts. The Beirut explosion that took place on August 4, 2020, has left many homeless, injured, grieving the loss of family members and/or friends, anxious about their loved ones, and in shock of the horrific scenes they witnessed.

The explosion shook not only Beirut residents, but the entire nation. Every one of us has been affected by the atrocity of the explosion in a way or another, if not physically, then mentally and emotionally. The LAU Counseling Team is available for the LAU Community at all times, and especially in these times of distress, we thought of extending our helping hands-through supporting you:

- I. **Understand the impact of the explosion on the emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioral levels**
- II. **Learn few strategies to support yourself**
- III. **Reach out to a professional**

## Understanding the impact of the explosion on the psychological, emotional, and physical levels

People who have experienced or witnessed a disaster may have an acute stress reaction that can cause some emotional, physical, cognitive and/or behavioral reactions. Some of them can be immediate, and others can happen at a later stage as follows:

<b>Immediate Emotional Reactions</b>	<b>Delayed Emotional Reactions</b>
Numbness and detachment	Irritability and/or hostility
Anxiety or severe fear	Depression
Guilt (including survivor guilt)	Mood swings, instability
Happiness as a result of surviving	Anxiety (e.g., phobia, generalized anxiety)
Anger	Fear of trauma recurrence
Sadness and Helplessness	Grief reactions
Feeling unreal (e.g., feeling as if you are watching yourself)	Feelings of fragility and/or vulnerability
Confusion about date, time, location, and/or identity	Emotional detachment from anything that requires emotional reactions (e.g., significant and/or family relationships, conversations about self, discussion of traumatic events or reactions to them)
Denial	
Inability to express feelings	
Feeling overwhelmed	

<p><b>Immediate Physical Reactions</b>  Nausea and/or gastrointestinal distress  Sweating or shivering  Faintness and/or extreme fatigue or exhaustion  Uncontrollable shaking  Elevated heartbeat, respiration, and blood pressure</p>	<p><b>Delayed Physical Reactions</b>  Sleep disturbances, nightmares  Increased focus on and worry about body aches and pains)  Appetite and digestive changes  Persistent fatigue</p>
<p><b>Immediate Cognitive Reactions</b>  Difficulty concentrating  Rumination or racing thoughts (e.g., replaying the traumatic event continuously)  Distortion of time and space (e.g., traumatic event may be perceived as if it was happening in slow motion, or a few seconds can be perceived as minutes)  Memory problems (e.g., not being able to recall important aspects of the trauma)  Strong identification with victims</p>	<p><b>Delayed Cognitive Reactions</b>  Intrusive memories or flashbacks  Reactivation of previous traumatic events  Self-blame/Survivor guilt  Preoccupation with event  Difficulty making decisions  Magical thinking: belief that certain behaviors, including avoidant behavior, will protect against future trauma  Suicidal thinking</p>
<p><b>Immediate Behavioral Reactions</b>  Startled reaction  Restlessness  Sleep and appetite disturbances  Difficulty expressing oneself  Argumentative behavior  Increased use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco  Withdrawal and apathy  Avoidant behaviors</p>	<p><b>Delayed Behavioral Reactions</b>  Avoidance of event reminders  Social relationship disturbances  Decreased activity level  Engagement in high-risk behaviors  Increased use of alcohol and drugs  Withdrawal</p>
<p><b>Immediate Existential Reactions</b>  Intense use of prayer  Restoration of faith in the goodness of others (e.g., receiving help from others)  Despair about humanity, particularly if the event was intentional  Immediate disruption of life assumptions (e.g., fairness, safety, goodness, predictability of life)</p>	<p><b>Delayed Existential Reactions</b>  Questioning (e.g., “Why me?”)  Increased self-confidence (e.g., “If I can survive this, I can survive anything”)  Loss of purpose  Renewed faith  Hopelessness  Reestablishing priorities  Redefining meaning and importance of life  Reworking life’s assumptions to accommodate the trauma (e.g., taking a self-defense class to reestablish a sense of safety)</p>

Adapted from: [Briere & Scott, 2006b](#); [Foa, Stein, & McFarlane, 2006](#); [Pietrzak, Goldstein, Southwick, & Grant, 2011, Chapter 3, Understanding the](#)

The most common reactions after witnessing or experiencing an explosion:

Recurring thoughts of the explosion.

Increased sensitivity to changes in your environment.

Daily routines and activities are no longer maintained.

Feelings of guilt and blame "I should have done something more."

Feelings of grief and loss.

Reluctance to express feelings for fear of losing control over emotions.

Emotional reactions, such as tears or anger.

Physical reactions, such as restlessness, aches or pains.

Each has their own coping style, depending on past experience dealing with traumatic situations, the level of social support around them, and access to resources.

## Learn few Strategies to support Self

**Recognize emotional change**

- Identify the feelings you are experiencing. They are likely "normal" and expected reactions to the explosion.

**Give yourself time to adjust**

- Anticipate that this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced and try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.

**Take a breath**

- Take a few seconds before acting on and making decisions when feeling stressed. Ask yourself if this action is the best for you and your family. Asking yourself this question will help you think more clearly.

**Keep connected**

- Social support is key at this point. Stay close to your friends and family, you can all support one another.

**Establish or reestablish routines**

- Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find some relief through relaxation techniques.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can be a numbing diversion that could detract from as well as delay active coping and moving forward from the disaster.

**Communicate your experience**

- Express what you are feeling in whatever ways feel comfortable to you—such as talking with family or close friends, keeping a diary, or engaging in a creative activity (e.g., drawing, molding clay, etc.).

**Recognize strengths**

- Remember the successful ways you have handled hardships in the past, such as the loss of a loved one, the end of a relationship or a serious illness. Remember these skills and transfer them to your current situation.

## Reach out to a professional

If you notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness and you feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities and activities or thinking about hurting yourself or someone else, please do not hesitate to seek assistance from one of the LAU Counselors or a health care professional.

**Please reach out to us:**

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