

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any incident that causes an individual to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later). Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Some of the more common reactions reported by individuals after a critical incident may include (but are not limited to):

<i>Physical *</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>
Chills	Confusion	Fear	Withdrawal
Thirst	Nightmares	Guilt	Antisocial acts
Fatigue	Uncertainty	Grief	Inability to rest
Nausea	Hyper-vigilance	Panic	Intensified pacing
Fainting	Suspiciousness	Denial	Erratic movements
Twitches	Intrusive images	Anxiety	Change in social activity
Vomiting	Blaming someone	Agitation	Change in speech patterns
Dizziness	Poor problem solving	Irritability	Loss or increase of appetite
Weakness	Poor abstract thinking	Intense anger	Hyper-alert to environment
Chest pain	Poor concentration/ memory	Apprehension	Increased alcohol consumption
Headaches	Disorientation of time, place or person	Emotional Shock	Change in usual communications
Elevated BP	Difficulty identifying objects or person	Emotional outbursts	Etc.
Rapid heart rate	Heightened or lowered alertness	Feeling overwhelmed	
Muscle tremors	Increased or decreased awareness of surrounding	Loss of emotional control	
Shock symptoms		Inappropriate emotional response	
Grinding of teeth		Etc.	
Visual difficulties			
Profuse sweating			
Difficulty breathing			
Etc.			

**** Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.***

SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SPEED UP THE RECOVERY PROCESS

- ◆ WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS: periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- ◆ Structure your time - keep busy.
- ◆ You're normal and having normal reactions - don't label yourself crazy.
- ◆ Talk to people - talk is the most healing medicine.
- ◆ Avoid *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol; you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- ◆ Reach out - people do care.
- ◆ Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- ◆ Spend time with others.
- ◆ Help your co-members as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- ◆ Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- ◆ Keep a journal; write (type/record) your way through those sleepless hours.
- ◆ Do things that feel good to you.
- ◆ Realize those around you are under stress.
- ◆ Don't make any big life changes.
- ◆ Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them even if you're not sure.
- ◆ Get plenty of rest.
- ◆ Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them; they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- ◆ Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

- ◆ Listen carefully.
- ◆ Spend time with the traumatized person.
- ◆ Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help.
- ◆ Reassure them that they are safe.
- ◆ Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family.
- ◆ Give them some private time.
- ◆ Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- ◆ Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse." Traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them.

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