

Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any incident that causes emergency service personnel 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 after 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 him or herself.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

<i>Physical</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>	<i>Spiritual</i>
chills	confusion	fear	withdrawal	questioning beliefs
thirst	nightmares	guilt	antisocial acts	faith crisis
fatigue	uncertainty	grief	inability to rest	questions regarding the nature of reality
nausea	hypervigilance	panic	intensified pacing	meaning, justice/fairness
fainting	suspiciousness	denial	erratic movements	feelings of abandonment
twitches	intrusive images	anxiety	change in social activity	doubts regarding governing principles and core values
vomiting	blaming someone	agitation	change in speech patterns	value of prayer questioned
dizziness	poor problem solving	irritability	loss or increase of appetite	hopelessness/fatalism
weakness	poor abstract thinking	depression	hyperalert to environment	issues of forgiveness questioned
chest pain	poor attention/decisions	intense anger	increased alcohol consumption	guilt/shame issues
headaches	poor concentration/memory	apprehension	change in usual communications	
elevated BP	disorientation of time, place or time	emotional shock	etc.	
rapid heart rate	difficulty identifying objects or people	emotional outbursts		
muscle tremors	heightened or lowered alertness	feeling overwhelmed		
shock symptoms	increased or decreased awareness or surroundings	loss of emotional control		
grinding of teeth	etc.	inappropriate emotional response		
visual difficulties		etc.		
profuse sweating				
difficulty breathing				
etc.				

Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation – when in doubt call a physician.

Things to try:

- 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.
- Be aware of 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-workers as much as possible.
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- Help your co-workers 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 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 decision 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 & 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, minding children.
- 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 assist them.

Stress Resistant Adaptation Profiles

- Personal faith development
- General physiological, psychological, sociological, emotional and spiritual well being
- Health and fitness consciousness
- Effective problem-solver
- Responsible life-style choices
- Healthy sense of humor
- Strong social support network
- Purposeful meaning in life
- Previous life experiences
- Concern for others