

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEETS

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 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.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reactions;

| <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 | hypervigilance | panic | intensified pacing |
| fainting | suspiciousness | denial | erratic movement |
| 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 | depression | hyperalert to environment |
| chest pain | poor attention / decisions | intense anger | increased alcohol |
| headaches | poor concentration / memory | apprehension | consumption |
| elevated BP | disorientation of time, place, person | emotional outbursts | change in usual |
| rapid heart rate | difficulty identifying objects, people | emotional shock | communications |
| muscle tremors | heightened or lowered alertness | feeling overwhelmed | etc... |
| shock symptoms | increased or decreased awareness | loss of emotional | |
| grinding of teeth | of surroundings | control | |
| visual difficulties | etc... | inappropriate emotional | |
| profuse sweating | | response | |
| difficulty breathing | | etc... | |
| etc... | | | |

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