

# CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET

*Source: Used with Permission- International Critical Incident Stress Foundation CISF, Inc. 2001*

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally).

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, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance 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 himself.

## **HERE ARE SOME COMMON SIGNS AND SIGNALS OF A STRESS REACTION:**

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Behavioral</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chills</li> <li>• thirst</li> <li>• fatigue</li> <li>• nausea</li> <li>• fainting</li> <li>• twitches</li> <li>• vomiting</li> <li>• dizziness</li> <li>• weakness</li> <li>• chest pain</li> <li>• headaches</li> <li>• elevated BP</li> <li>• rapid heart rate</li> <li>• muscle tremors</li> <li>• shock symptoms</li> <li>• grinding of teeth</li> <li>• visual difficulties</li> <li>• profuse sweating</li> <li>• difficulty breathing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confusion</li> <li>• nightmares</li> <li>• uncertainty</li> <li>• hypervigilance</li> <li>• suspiciousness</li> <li>• intrusive images</li> <li>• blaming someone</li> <li>• poor problem solving</li> <li>• poor abstract thinking</li> <li>• poor attention/ decisions</li> <li>• poor concentration/memory</li> <li>• disorientation of time, place or person</li> <li>• difficulty identifying objects or people</li> <li>• heightened or lowered alertness</li> <li>• increased or decreased awareness of surroundings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear</li> <li>• guilt</li> <li>• grief</li> <li>• panic</li> <li>• denial</li> <li>• anxiety</li> <li>• agitation</li> <li>• irritability</li> <li>• depression</li> <li>• intense anger</li> <li>• apprehension</li> <li>• emotional shock</li> <li>• emotional outbursts</li> <li>• feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>• loss of emotional control</li> <li>• inappropriate emotional response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• withdrawal</li> <li>• antisocial acts</li> <li>• inability to rest</li> <li>• intensified pacing</li> <li>• erratic movements</li> <li>• change in social activity</li> <li>• change in speech patterns</li> <li>• loss or increase of appetite</li> <li>• hyperalert to environment</li> <li>• increased alcohol consumption</li> <li>• change in usual communications</li> </ul>

***Note: 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 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 decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer him even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks - they are normal and will 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 (s)he has not asked for help.
- Reassure him that (s)he is 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 him that (s)he is "lucky it wasn't worse." A traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred, and you want to understand and assistance.