

Critical Incident Stress Information Sheets

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 horrific event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Or they may appear in a few hours or 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 mental instability 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:

Physical*	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
chills	confusion	fear	withdrawal
thirst	nightmares	guilt	Antisocial acts
fatigue	uncertainty	grief	Inability to rest
nausea	hypervigilance	panic	Intensified pacing
fainting	suspiciousness	denial	Erratic movements
twitches	Intrusive images	anxiety	Change in social patterns
vomiting	Blaming someone	agitation	Change in speech patterns
weakness	Poor abstract thinking	depression	Hyperalert to environment
Chest pain	Poor attention/decisions	Intense anger	Increased alcohol consumption
headaches	Poor concentration/memory	apprehension	Change in usual communications
Elevated BP	Disorientation of time, place or person	Emotional outbursts	
Rapid heart rate	Difficulty identifying objects or people	Loss of emotional response	
Muscle tremors	Heightened or lowered alertness	Inappropriate emotional response	
Shock symptoms	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	Emotional shock	
Grinding of teeth		Feeling overwhelmed	
Visual difficulties			
Profuse sweating			
Difficulty breathing			

*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 them 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 AND FRIENDS

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with 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 the 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;' a traumatized person is not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.