

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 alone.

Here are some very common signs and signals of a stress reaction.

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
fatigue	blaming someone	anxiety	change in activity
nausea	confusion	guilt	change in speech
muscle tremors	poor attention	grief	patterns
twitches	poor decisions	denial	withdrawal
chest pain*	heightened or	severe panic	emotional
difficulty breathing*	lowered	(rare)	outbursts
elevated BP	alertness	emotional shock	suspiciousness
rapid heart rate	poor concentration	fear	change in usual
thirst	memory problems	uncertainty	communications
headaches	hypervigilance	loss of emotion	loss of or increase
visual difficulties	difficulty	control	in appetite
vomiting	identifying	depression	alcohol
grinding of teeth	familiar objects	inappropriate	consumption
weakness	or people	emotional	inability to rest
dizziness	increased or	response	antisocial acts
profuse sweating	decreased awareness	apprehension	nonspecific bodily
chills	of surroundings	feeling	complaints
shock symptoms*	poor problem solving	overwhelmed	hyperalert to
fainting	poor abstract thinking	intense anger	environment
	loss of time, place	irritability	startle reflex
	or person orientation	agitation	intensified
	disturbed thinking		pacing
	nightmares		erratic movements
	intrusive images		change in sexual
			functioning

* definite indication of the need for medical evaluation

Things to try:

- * WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS periods of strenuous 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're doing.
- * Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feeling 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 even 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.