

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 interface with their ability to function either at the scene or at a later time). 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. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs & 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 & 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.

Listed below are some very common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

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

* definite indication of the need for medical evaluation

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THE CRITICAL INCIDENT:

Any incident faced by EMS personnel that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional involvement may qualify for "CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING". The following are examples of incidents that may be selected for debriefing:

- A. Serious injury or death of an EMS worker. i.e. law enforcement, firefighter or other emergency personnel working at a incident (or enroute).
- B. Mass Casualty Incidents.
- C. Suicide of a crew member.
- D. Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from EMS operations. i.e. auto accident, ect.
- E. Death of a child, or violence to a child.
- F. Loss of life of a patient following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical & emotional energy during rescue efforts by EMS personnel.
- G. Incidents that attract extremely unusual or critical news media coverage.
- H. Events in which the victims are relatives of or are known to emergency services personnel
- I. Any incident that is charged with profound emotion.
- J.. An incident in which the circumstances were so unusual or the sights & sounds so distressing as to produce a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction.

WAYS FOR YOU TO RESPOND TO THE STRESS REACTION:

WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HRS. - Periods of strenuous physical exercise alternating with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.

Structure your time - keep busy.

You're normal & 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 feeling & checking out how they're doing.

Give yourself permission to feel rotten & 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 also 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 will decrease with time & become less painful.

Eat well balanced and regular meals (even if you don't like it).

**WAYS FOR YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS TO RESPOND TO YOUR
STRESS REACTION:**

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 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.