

Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet

You have experienced a traumatic event or critical incident (any incident that causes you to experience unusually strong emotional or physical reactions which have the potential to interfere with your ability to function)

Even though the event may be over, it is possible for individuals to experience emotional aftershocks hours or days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction depend on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and 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 reaction:

Physical: Chills, thirst, fatigue, nausea, fainting, twitches, vomiting, dizziness, weakness, chest pain, headaches, elevated blood pressure, rapid heart rate, muscle tremors, shock symptoms, grinding of teeth, visual difficulties, profuse sweating, difficulty breathing, etc.

Emotional: Fear, guilt, grief, panic, denial, anxiety, agitation, irritability, depression, intense anger, apprehension, emotional shock, emotional outbursts, feeling overwhelmed, loss of emotional control, inappropriate emotional response, etc.

Cognitive: Confusion, nightmares, uncertainty, hypervigilance, suspiciousness, intrusive images, blaming someone, poor problem solving, poor abstract thinking, poor attention/decisions, poor concentration/memory, disorientation of time, place or person, difficulty identifying objects or people, heightened or lowered alertness, increased or decreased awareness of surroundings, etc.

Behavioral: Withdrawal, antisocial acts, inability to rest, intensified pacing, erratic movements, change in social activity, change in speech patterns, loss or increase of appetite, hyperalert to environment, increased alcohol consumption, change in usual communications, etc.

Spiritual: Anger at God, questioning of basic beliefs, withdrawal from place of worship, faith practices and rituals seem empty, loss of meaning and purpose, uncharacteristic religious involvement, sense of isolation from God, anger at clergy, etc.

You may access the **Mobile Response Team** through the Distress Centre (**24 hour line**) **266-4357**

Ways for you to respond to the stress reaction:

- **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.
- Beware 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 coworkers 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 that 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 are not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

Ways For Family Members And Friends To Respond To Your Stress Reaction

- Listen carefully
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and 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.

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Mobile Response Team Hours of Operation: 9:30 a.m. - 9:30 p.m. Weekdays
9:30 a.m. – 9:30 p.m. Weekends