

## CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET<sup>1</sup>

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 a 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 the understanding and the support of loved one 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 event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

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

<i>Physical</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>
-Fatigue -Nausea -Muscle tremors -Twitches -Chest Pain* -Difficulty -Breathing* -Elevated BP -Rapid Heart Rate -Thirst -Headaches -Visual difficulties -Vomiting -Grinding of teeth -Weakness -Dizziness -Profuse symptoms* -Fainting -Etc.	-Blaming someone -Confusion -Poor Attention -Poor Decisions -Heightened/Lower alertness -Poor concentration -Memory problems -Hypervigilance -Difficulty identifying familiar objects/people -Increase/decrease of awareness of surroundings -Poor problem solving -Poor abstract thinking -Loss of time, place or person orientation -Disturbed thinking -Nightmares -Intrusive images -Etc.	-Anxiety -Guilt -Grief -Denial -Severe panic (rare) -Emotional shock -Fear -Uncertainty -Loss of emotion control -Depression -Inappropriate emotional response -Apprehension -Feeling overwhelmed -Intense anger -Irritability -Agitation -Etc.	-Change in activity -Change in speech patterns -Withdrawal -Emotional outbursts -Suspiciousness -Change in usual communications -Loss/ increase of appetite -Alcohol consumption -Inability to rest -Antisocial acts -Nonspecific bodily complaints -Hypervigilance -Startle reflex intensified -Pacing -Erratic movements

\*definite indication of the need for medical evaluation

<sup>1</sup>Copied from the material for Jeffrey Mitchell, PH.D., & University of Maryland, Baltimore County Monterey County CISM Team  
Critical Incident Stress Management

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### 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 reaction- 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 how they're 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 decision 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 MEMEBERS AND 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, etc.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse"- traumatized people are not consoled by these statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.