

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION

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 been exposed to a traumatic event.

No two people will respond the same to a particular traumatic event. Each of us was raised differently and we each have different life experiences, resulting in the development of our individual coping skills. Some people may experience mild stress reactions, while others may experience moderate to severe stress symptoms, based on their involvement, physical and mental proximity to the event. Stress symptoms may appear immediately, within a few minutes, hours or days of the event. In some cases, stress reactions may not appear or intensify for weeks, months or years after the event, sometimes occurring in connection with being exposed to another traumatic event(s).

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last for a few days, weeks, months, or even longer, depending on the severity of your exposure to the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones and coworkers 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 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 symptoms of a stress reaction:

<u>Physical</u> *	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>
Chills	Confusion	Sad	Withdrawal and isolation
Thirst	Nightmares	Fear	Antisocial acts
Fatigue	Uncertainty	Guilt	Intensified pacing
Nausea	Hypervigilance	Grief	Erratic movements
Fainting	Suspiciousness	Panic	Change in social activity
Twitches	Intrusive images	Denial	Change in speech patterns
Vomiting	Blaming someone	Anxiety	Loss or increase of appetite
Dizziness	Poor problem solving	Agitation	Hyper alert to environment
Weakness	Poor abstract thinking	Irritability	Increased use of alcohol, nicotine, caffeine or drugs
Chest pain	Poor decision making	Depression	Change in communications
Headaches	Poor concentration	Intense anger	Change in work productivity
Elevated blood pressure	Disorientation of person, place and time	Apprehension	Unusual silence
Rapid heart rate	Difficulty identifying objects or people	Emotional shock	Unusual talkativeness
Muscle tremors	Heightened or lowered level of alertness	Emotional outbursts	Change in eating habits
Skin disorders (rashes - hives)	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	Feeling overwhelmed	Inability to sleep
Shock symptoms	Memory loss	Loss of emotional control	Over sensitivity
Grinding of teeth	Limited attention span	Inappropriate emotional response	etc ...
Visual difficulties	Constant worrying	Hopelessness or helplessness	
Profuse sweating	Startle reactions	Suicidal thoughts or behaviors	<u>Spiritual</u>
Difficulty breathing	Transference of event circumstances to your life	Resentment	Feeling abandoned by God
Gastro-intestinal issues	etc...	Sudden mood swings	Finding it hard to pray
Cardiac arrest		Loneliness	No spirit of thankfulness
Allergies (caused or aggravated)		Emotional numbing	Questioning your faith and beliefs
Immune system disorders		Urges to cry	etc...
Auditory exclusion		etc...	
etc...			

* Any of these symptoms may indicate a need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.

MANAGING STRESS:

- Remember you are human and following a traumatic event you may experience a number of stress reactions.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't fight them; they should decrease over time and become less painful and threatening.
- Don't label yourself as going crazy, you are likely experiencing normal stress reactions following your involvement in an abnormal "traumatic" situation.
- For the first 24 - 48 hours, participate in periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with periods of relaxation to help alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Get plenty of rest and overnight sleep.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Avoid greasy, fatty foods and those with high salt concentrations; such as found in fast food restaurants.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water, which will help flush the by-products of the stress reaction from your body.
- Structure your time with planned activities to keep yourself busy.
- Move back to your normal routine as soon as possible and maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Talk to people you trust and have confidence in; talking through a traumatic event is some of the most healing medicine.
- Give yourself permission to feel bad and share your thoughts and feelings with others.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of over-the-counter or prescription medications or alcohol, you don't need to complicate your situation with potential substance abuse problems.
- Reach out for assistance; it is a sign of strength and people do care about you.
- Spend time with your family, friends and coworkers.
- Realize those around you are also likely experiencing stress symptoms.
- Check with your co-workers and find out how they are doing.
- Keep a journal; putting your personal thoughts and feelings in writing may help you understand and process the event.
- Do healthy things that you enjoy and make you feel good.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible, giving you a sense of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them even if you're not sure.
- Delay making any major life changing decisions.
- Develop a healthy support system and maintain balance in your life.

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS & COWORKERS

- Listen carefully.
- Don't be judgmental.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Give them some private time to recuperate.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Expect some to lash out or to make irrational statements, don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Help co-workers by checking in with them regularly and allowing them to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.
- Don't tell them that "you know how they feel" or that "they were lucky it wasn't worse;" a traumatized person is 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.
- Monitor those with moderate to severe stress symptoms for unhealthy or self-destructive behaviors.
- Those experiencing unhealthy or self-destructive behaviors, or prolonged or intensifying stress symptoms should be encouraged to seek professional counseling.