

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION (TRAUMATIC EVENT) – Page 1 of 2

When people experience an incident that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at that event or later, mental health professionals call this a traumatic event or a critical incident. Even though the event may be over, the individual may continue to experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact, quite *normal* for someone to experience aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the incident. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before 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 upon the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and support of loved ones and co-workers, 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 very common signs and signals of stress reaction:

*indicates definite need for medical evaluation

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE (THOUGHT)	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Nausea • Muscle tremors • Twitches • Chest pain* • Difficulty breathing* • Elevated BP • Rapid heart rate • Thirst • Headaches • Visual difficulties • Vomiting • Grinding of teeth • Weakness • Dizziness • Shock symptoms* • Fainting • Etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming someone • Confusion • Poor attention span • Heightened/lowered alertness • Poor concentration • Memory problems • Hypervigilance • Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people • Increased/decreased awareness of surroundings • Poor problem solving • Poor abstract thinking • Loss of time, place or person orientation • Disturbed thinking • Nightmares • Intrusive images • Etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Guilt • Grief • Denial • Severe panic (rare) • Loss of emotional control • Depression • Inappropriate emotional response • Apprehension • Feeling overwhelmed • Intense anger • Agitation • Etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in activity • Changes in speech patterns • Withdrawal • Emotional outbursts • Suspiciousness • Change in unusual communication • Loss/increase of appetite • Alcohol consumption • Inability to rest • Antisocial acts • Nonspecific bodily complaints • Hyperalert to environment • Increased startle reflex • Pacing • Erratic movements • Change in sexual functioning

Persons experiencing any of the above symptoms should be evaluated by a licensed mental health professional.

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This information is provided for information only and is not a substitute for a consultation or care with a fully qualified mental health professional or other health care professional.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGING STRESS:

- Within the first 24 to 72 hours - alternate periods of strenuous physical exercise with relaxation. This will alleviate some of the physical symptoms.
- Structure your time-stay busy.
- Do not attempt to numb the pain with use of alcohol or drugs as this could actually intensify the "bad feelings" and not help you to feel better.
- Stay in touch with others --it is important not to isolate.
- Maintain your normal routine as much as possible.
- Talk to someone who had a similar experience.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with friends and family.
- If you can't sleep --keep a journal, it may help.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your own life.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal and they should decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Avoid caffeine --it is a stimulant to your body and mind.
- Talk to a mental health professional who can help you process the traumatic incident.

REMEMBER: YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED AN ABNORMAL SITUATION THAT YOU WILL NEED TO PROCESS

SUMMARY:

1. Exercise Aerobically
2. Eat good meals
3. Avoid alcohol or drugs
4. Get rest
5. Talk to someone about it
6. Remember it takes time to heal