

## ***Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet***

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We are currently living through a traumatic event - a critical incident of the highest order.

A critical incident is one that causes unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with our ability to function either at the scene or later.

You may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reaction. It is very common, in fact quite **normal**, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when we are going through or 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 understanding and the support of loved ones the stress reaction usually passes more quickly.

Please look over the following pages for information on some normal stress reactions, some coping strategies to help you manage the stress, and a page you can share with your family and friends to help them support you as you walk this path.

Please feel free to reach out to any member of the CISM team if you need support or would like to talk things over.

## **Common Signs and Signals –**

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

### **Physical**

fatigue  
nausea  
muscle tremors  
twitches  
chest pain\*  
difficulty breathing\*  
elevated BP  
headaches  
thirst  
visual difficulties  
grinding of teeth  
weakness  
dizziness  
profuse sweating  
chills  
shock symptoms\*  
vomiting  
fainting  
etc...

### **Emotional**

Anxiety  
guilt  
grief  
denial  
severe panic (rare)  
emotional shock  
fear  
uncertainty  
loss of emotional control depression  
inappropriate emotional response  
agitation  
apprehension  
feel overwhelmed  
intense anger  
etc...

### **Cognitive**

confusion, disorientation  
poor attention  
poor decision making  
heightened or lowered alertness  
poor concentration memory  
problems hyper vigilance  
difficulty identifying familiar objects or people  
rapid heart rate  
increased/decreased awareness surroundings  
poor problem solving  
poor abstract thinking  
loss of time, place or person, orientation  
disturbed thinking, nightmares, intrusive images  
etc...

### **Spiritual**

anger at your God, higher power  
loss of religious or spiritual beliefs  
questioning ability to forgive  
change in sense of self

### **Behavioral**

change in society  
change in speech patterns  
loss or increase of appetite  
withdrawal  
emotional outbursts  
suspiciousness  
change in usual communications skills  
pacing  
startle reflex  
hyper alert to environment  
alcohol consumption  
inability to rest  
antisocial acts  
nonspecific bodily complaints  
erratic movements  
change in sexual functioning

**\*definite indication of the need for medical evaluation**

## **Helpful Coping Strategies & Self Care**

- \* Periods of physical activity (based on your physical condition and physical limitations), alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reaction.
- \* 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 out how they are doing.
- \* Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feeling with others.
- \* Keep a journal; write your way through the 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, if someone asks you what 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 Members & Friends**

- \* Listen carefully.
- \* 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.
- \* Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, and 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" - that statement does not console traumatized people. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.