

Critical Incident Stress

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 aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the 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.

A stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually causes 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 alone.

REACTIONS TO CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

Physical*	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual
Chills	Confusion	Fear	Withdrawal	Anger at God
Thirst	Nightmares	Guilt	<i>Antisocial acts</i>	Withdrawal from Faith-based Community
Fatigue	Uncertainty	Grief	Inability to rest	
Nausea	Hypervigilance	<i>Panic Attacks</i>	Intensified pacing	Crisis of Faith
<i>Fainting / LoC</i>	Suspiciousness	Denial	Erratic movements	
Twitches	Intrusive images	Anxiety	Change in social activity	<i>Cessation from Practice</i>
Vomiting	Blaming someone	Agitation	Change in speech	<i>of Faith</i>
Dizziness	Poor problem solving	Irritability	Change in appetite	
<i>Weakness / Numbness</i>	Poor abstract thinking	Depression (<i>immobilizing</i>)	Hyper-alertness	<i>Religious</i>
<i>Chest pain</i>	Change in attention/ decisions	Intense Anger	Change in alcohol or drug consumption	<i>Hallucinations or</i>
<i>Headaches</i>	Poor concentration/memory, disorientation of time, place or person	Apprehension	Change in usual communications style / pattern	<i>Delusions</i>
Elevated BP	Difficulty identifying objects or people, heightened or lowered alertness	Emotional Shock	<i>Abuse of Others</i>	
<i>Rapid heart rate</i>	Change in awareness of surroundings	Emotional Outbursts	<i>Diminished personal Hygiene</i>	
Muscle tremors	<i>Suicidal/Homicidal Thoughts</i>	Feeling Overwhelmed	<i>Immobility</i>	
Grinding of teeth	<i>Hallucination, Delusions</i>	Loss of Emotional Control	<i>Self Medication</i>	
Shock symptoms	<i>Persistent Diminished Problem-solving</i>	Inappropriate Emotional Response	<i>Violence</i>	
Visual difficulties	<i>Paranoid Ideas</i>	<i>Infantile Emotions</i>		
Profuse sweating	<i>Disabling Guilt</i>			
Difficult breathing	<i>Hopelessness & Helplessness</i>			

*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation.

Italics indicates referral to next level of care.

When in DOUBT -> REFER

Some Things to Try

- ✔ 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.
- ✔ 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 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 also 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're not sure.
- ✔ Get plenty of rest.
- ✔ Recurring 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, ask if they want a back/neck massage.
- ✔ 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, 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.

**RAPPAHANNOCK EMS COUNCIL
CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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*Obtain from www.icisf.org
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