

## Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet

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 the 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 understanding and the support of loved ones 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 him or herself.

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

| <i>Physical</i>      | <i>Cognitive</i>                                 | <i>Emotional</i>                 | <i>Behavioral</i>              | <i>Spiritual</i>                                       |
|----------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| chills               | confusion  | fear                             | withdrawal                     | questioning beliefs                                    |
| thirst               | nightmares                                       | guilt                            | antisocial acts                | faith crisis   |
| fatigue              | uncertainty                                      | grief                            | inability to rest              | questions regarding the nature of reality              |
| nausea               | hypervigilance                                   | panic                            | intensified pacing             | meaning, justice/fairness                              |
| fainting             | suspiciousness                                   | denial                           | erratic movements              | feelings of abandonment                                |
| twitches             | intrusive images                                 | anxiety                          | change in social activity      | doubts regarding governing principles and core values  |
| vomiting             | blaming someone                                  | agitation                        | change in speech patterns      | value of prayer questioned                             |
| dizziness            | poor problem solving                             | irritability                     | loss or increase of appetite   | hopelessness/fatalism                                  |
| weakness             | poor abstract thinking                           | depression                       | hyper-alert to environment     | issues of forgiveness questioned                       |
| chest pain           | poor attention/decisions                         | intense anger                    | increased alcohol consumption  | guilt/shame issues                                     |
| headaches            | poor concentration, memory                       | apprehension                     | change in usual communications | anger at God, clergy                                   |
| elevated BP          | disorientation of time, place or time            | emotional shock                  |                                | withdrawal from place of worship and worship community |
| rapid heart rate     | difficulty identifying objects or people         | emotional outbursts              |                                |  |
| muscle tremors       | heightened or lowered alertness                  | feeling overwhelmed              |                                |  |
| shock symptoms       | increased or decreased awareness or surroundings | loss of emotional control        |                                |  |
| grinding of teeth    | etc.   | inappropriate emotional response |                                |  |
| visual difficulties  | difficulty in making decisions, calculations     |                                  |                                |  |
| profuse sweating     |  |                                  |                                |  |
| difficulty breathing |  |                                  |                                |  |

*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation - when in doubt call a physician.*

### Things to consider:

WITHIN THE FIRST 24 – 48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions. Remember that if you are doing fine and not experiencing stress symptoms, someone else on your crew maybe having a different experience than you. Be supportive of others.

- Techniques to avoid exposure to stressors
  - Engage problem solving/conflict resolution
  - Consider time management options
  - Affirm good nutrition within a balanced diet
  - Decrease known stressors
  - Avoid life altering decisions/changes
  - Avoid unrealistic expectations for recovery
  - Gain perspectives regarding your FUD factors  
(*Fears, Uncertainties and Doubts*)
- Reappraisal or reinterpretation of stressors
  - You're normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as "weak" or "crazy."
  - Maintain as normal a schedule as possible
  - If experiencing reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
  - Cognitive reframing, outside guidance, gain new perspectives
  - Recognize when it is a normal reaction to temporary abnormal situation
  - Affirm acceptance of feelings
  - Engage your social support network – Talk.
  - Reach out to people, they do care
  - Meet regularly with your mentor or life coach
  - Connect with your faith support community
  - Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
  - Take time to journal
  - Consider counseling
- Techniques to reduce stress arousal
  - Engage your regular devotional life / spiritual disciplines
  - Monitor your days off, make sure you are taking them
  - Get plenty of rest, and maintain proper sleep patterns
  - Consider a massage, sauna or soaking in a warm bath
  - Devote time to relaxation and prayer
  - Schedule in some fun activities
  - Invest time in reading, hobbies, crafts, cooking
  - Play with a family pet
  - Avoid overindulging with alcohol and stimulants trying to numb the pain
  - Drink plenty of water - Hydrate
  - Be cautious on over-medicating with prescription drugs
  - Avoid changes in routines/maintain normalcy
  - Strengthen relationships and faith commitments
  - Listen to music that relaxes and refreshes you
  - Make sure you are on schedule for your days off and vacations
- Techniques to ventilate stress arousal (catharsis)
  - Keep busy, rocking chairs and healthy motion routines
  - Engage physical exercise and recreation (non-competitive)
  - Play family games with friends and loved ones
  - Make time for activities that are enjoyed
  - Live, love, laugh and learn