



## Stress and Critical Incident Information

You have experienced a traumatic event or 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 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 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 himself or herself.

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

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fatigue</li> <li>• nausea</li> <li>• muscle tremors</li> <li>• twitches</li> <li>• chest pain*</li> <li>• difficulty breathing*</li> <li>• elevated BP</li> <li>• rapid heart rate</li> <li>• thirst</li> <li>• headaches</li> <li>• visual difficulties</li> <li>• vomiting</li> <li>• grinding of teeth</li> <li>• weakness</li> <li>• dizziness</li> <li>• profuse sweating</li> <li>• chills</li> <li>• shock symptoms</li> <li>• fainting</li> <li>• etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• blaming someone</li> <li>• confusion</li> <li>• poor attention</li> <li>• poor decisions</li> <li>• heightened or lowered alertness</li> <li>• poor concentration</li> <li>• memory problems</li> <li>• hypervigilance</li> <li>• difficulty identifying familiar objects or people</li> <li>• increased or decreased awareness of surroundings</li> <li>• poor problem solving</li> <li>• poor abstract thinking, loss of time, place, or person</li> <li>• disturbed thinking</li> <li>• nightmares</li> <li>• intrusive images</li> <li>• etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anxiety</li> <li>• guilt</li> <li>• grief</li> <li>• denial</li> <li>• severe panic (rare)</li> <li>• emotional shock</li> <li>• fear</li> <li>• uncertainty</li> <li>• loss of emotional control</li> <li>• depression</li> <li>• inappropriate emotional response</li> <li>• apprehension</li> <li>• feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>• intense anger</li> <li>• irritability</li> <li>• agitation</li> <li>• etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• change in activity</li> <li>• change in speech patterns</li> <li>• withdrawal</li> <li>• emotional outbursts</li> <li>• suspiciousness</li> <li>• change in usual communications</li> <li>• loss or increase of appetite</li> <li>• alcohol consumption</li> <li>• inability to rest</li> <li>• antisocial acts</li> <li>• nonspecific bodily complaints</li> <li>• hyperalert to environment</li> <li>• startle reflex intensified</li> <li>• pacing</li> <li>• erratic movements</li> <li>• change in sexual functioning</li> <li>• etc.</li> </ul>

\*Definite indication of the need for medical evaluation.



## **Things to try:**

- Within the first 24 - 48 hours periods of strenuous physical exercise, 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 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're 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 under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- 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 are 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).

## **Delayed Stress Response Syndrome:**

Sometimes a stress response can be delayed, and you may not think it is associated with the traumatic event. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Increased feelings of depression, anxiety and irritability
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating habits
- Loss of emotional control
- Feeling of isolation
- Lowering sexual drive
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Lowered interest in loved ones
- Marital conflict

If the condition becomes more acute, you may experience:

- Intrusive memories
- Fear of repetition of the event



City of Vancouver  
Fire and Rescue Services

Vancouver  
Fire Fighters Association  
*International Association of Fire Fighters*  
Local 18



**Needing someone to talk to? Feeling Suicidal?**

**Contact your Local Lower Mainland Crisis Society 24/7:**

**ANYWHERE IN BC: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)**

**Lower Mainland: (604)-872-3311**

**Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789**

**Online Chat Services (youth): [www.youthinbc.com](http://www.youthinbc.com) (noon - 1am)**

**Online Chat Service (adult): [www.crisiscentrechat.ca](http://www.crisiscentrechat.ca) (noon - 1am)**

**To find a local Counselor visit:**

**<http://bc-counsellors.force.com/CounsellorSearch>**

**Call 211 or go to [www.bc211.ca](http://www.bc211.ca)**

**Employment Assistance Program:**

**[www.HomeWeb.ca](http://www.HomeWeb.ca) / [1.800.663.1142](http://1.800.663.1142).**

**Visit our very own website for these and many more resources:**

**[www.VancouverCISM.com](http://www.VancouverCISM.com)**

