

## CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET

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 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, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause 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 by himself.

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	
fainting	suspiciousness	denial	erratic movements	meaning, justice/ fairness
twitches	intrusive images	anxiety	change in social activity	feelings of abandonment
vomiting	blaming someone	agitation	change in speech patterns	doubts regarding governing principles or core values
dizziness	poor problem solving	irritability	loss or increase of appetite	value of prayer questioned
weakness	poor abstract thinking	depression	hyper-alert to environment	anger at God, clergy
chest pain	poor attention/decisions	intense anger	increased alcohol consumption	
headaches	poor concentration, memory	apprehension	change in usual communications	withdrawal from place of worship and worship community
elevated BP	disorientation of time, place or people	emotional shock		issues of forgiveness questioned
rapid heart rate	difficulty identifying objects or people	emotional outbursts		hopelessness / fatalism
muscle tremors	heightened or lowered alertness	feeling overwhelmed		guilt/shame issues
shock symptoms	increased or decreased awareness or surroundings, etc.	loss of emotional control		
grinding of teeth	difficulty in making decisions, calculations			
visual difficulties		inappropriate emotional response		
profuse sweating				
difficulty breathing				

**\* Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.**

## THINGS TO TRY:

- 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 with one another
  - 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**
  - Monitor your days off/vacations, 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
  - Engage in activities that support one's faith
  - Play with a family pet
  - Avoid overindulging with alcohol and stimulants trying to numb the pain
  - Drink plenty of water – Hydrate
  - Eat well balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it)
  - 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

- **Techniques to ventilate stress arousal (catharsis)**
  - Talk it out with a trusted colleague or friend
  - Keep busy, rocking chairs and healthy aerobic 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

## **FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS**

- Listen carefully with compassion.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if (s)he has not asked for help.
- Admit that you do not understand what they are going through... but you are 'there' to offer support.
- Reassure him/her that he is safe.
- Help her/him with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give him /her some private time.
- Don't take his/her anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell him/her that they are "lucky it wasn't worse;" a traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell him that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist him.
- Encourage them to meet with a crisis interventionist if they have not done so. This should occur within 24 to 72 hours. If such a meeting is not possible in that time frame, it is better to meet later than not at all.

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