

Critical Incident Information Sheet

A critical incident is any event that is powerful enough to overwhelm your usual ability to function either at the time of the event or later. Although the event is over, reactions may continue.

Sometimes people experience signs and symptoms of a stress reaction immediately, or they may appear hours or days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before stress reactions appear. These symptoms may last a few days, weeks, or even months. Occasionally, they last longer. The intensity and duration of the reactions usually depend on the severity of the event. Therefore, people exposed to the same event may report varying reactions, ranging from little or no distress to severe distress. Your personal experiences and current life situation may influence the degree of your reaction.

Talking about a traumatic event and your reaction to it seems to be the best antidote. A debriefing is one way to accomplish this. Occasionally, an event can produce such intense reactions that you may find it helpful to talk with a specially trained mental health professional.

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

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL
Fatigue Nausea Twitches, muscle tremors Chest pain * Difficulty breathing* Elevated blood pressure Rapid heart rate Headaches Visual difficulties Vomiting Grinding of the teeth Weakness Dizziness Profuse sweating Chills Shock symptoms* Fainting Thirst Muffled hearing	Blaming someone Confusion Poor attention span Poor decisions Heightened or lowered alertness Poor concentration Memory problems Hypervigilance Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings Poor problem solving Poor abstract thinking Loss of time, place, or person orientation Disturbed thinking Nightmares Intrusive thoughts or images	Anxiety Guilt Grief Denial Severe panic (rare) Emotional shock Fear Uncertainty Loss of emotional control Depression Inappropriate emotional response apprehension feeling overwhelmed intense anger irritability agitation	Change in activity Change in speech patterns Withdrawal Emotional outbursts Suspiciousness Change in usual pattern of communication Sleep/appetite disturbances Alcohol consumption Inability to rest Antisocial acts Nonspecific bodily complaints Hyperalertness to the environment Intensified startle reflex Pacing Erratic movements Changes in sexual functioning

*DEFINITE INDICATOR OF THE NEED FOR MEDICAL EVALUATION

