

TRAUMATIC INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any incident that would cause most individuals 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 disturbing event.

Sometimes the emotional 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 the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a professional may be necessary. This does not imply weakness or emotional failing. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to assimilate the emotions and reactions by themselves.

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

Physical Symptoms	Behavior Symptoms	Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
Grinding of Teeth	Change in activity level	Blaming others	Grief, Survivor guilt
Feeling Uncoordinated	Withdrawal	Lowered attention span	Denial or Fear
Headaches	Suspiciousness	Calculation difficulties	Uncertainty of feelings
Nausea/ Upset Stomach	Change in interaction or communication	Difficulty sleeping/ Distressing dreams	Anticipatory anxiety or panic
Profuse Sweating or Chills	Outbursts of Anger or Rage	Repetitive thought of the event	Depression, Hopelessness
Dry Mouth	Change in food intake	Poor concentration	Feeling lost, abandoned
Twitches/Shakes	Increased smoking	Memory problems	Feeling overwhelmed
Muscle Aches	Increased alcohol/ drug intake	Disruption in logical thinking	Loss of emotional control (crying, laughing)
Vision Problems	Hyper-alertness or hyper-vigilance	Difficulty making decisions	Wishing to hide/die
Fatigue	Excessive humor or silence	Minimizing the experience	Irritability
*Difficulty breathing	Restlessness, Agitation	Flashbacks	Feeling emotional numb
*Rapid Heart Rate/ Elevated BP	Easily startled by noises or touch	Confusion or disorientation	Identifying with victim
*Chest Pain		Difficulty trusting	Excessive worry

* Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for an immediate medical evaluation - when in doubt, contact a physician.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- 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 beneficial medicine.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them- they'll decrease over time.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate the situation with substance abuse.
- Reach out - 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.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress also.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- But, don't make any *big* life changes or decisions.
- Get professional help if *any* of your symptoms aren't decreasing with time. Or the symptoms are making your life, and/or relationships with others, difficult to manage.

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

- Listen carefully. Talking is the best way for the person to process the event.
- Spend time with the person, don't avoid them.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear, even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Don't judge their feelings or reactions to the event.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for children, or making arrangements.
- Give them some private time, but be aware of their personal safety.
- 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 statement. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

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