

CRITICAL INCIDENT INFORMATION

You have just participated in a critical incident. You have been exposed to sights, sounds, smells, thoughts, or work demands that exceed normal working conditions or life experiences. Even though the event is over, you may find yourself continuing to experience reactions for several days. Some common reactions include:

PHYSICAL	THINKING	EMOTIONAL	SPIRITUAL
Adrenalin rush (as if you drank 1,000 cups of coffee)	"in a fog" "Like a nightmare" Slowed thinking	All stirred up	Loss of innocence (things will never be quite the same)
Rapid breathing	Indecision	Numb	Loss of meaning
Tremors (hands and lips) Clumsiness	Memory loss	Anxiety/Fear	Loss of direction
Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea	Difficulty concentrating, poor attention span	Sadness, Depression	Thoughts of mortality
Sweating/chills	Confusion	Embarrassed	Emptiness, doubt, apathy
Cardiac symptoms: rapid heartbeat, increased BP, chest, pack pain (check out at hospital)	Difficulty problem solving, calculating	Insulated, alienated, wanting to hide	Cynicism, unforgiving
Head & muscle aches	Distressing dreams	Guilt	Feelings that you don't belong
Dizziness	Images you can't get out of your head	"Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda"	Casting blame
Sleep disturbance	Disorientation	Anger, Irritability	Feeling abandoned
Sexual dysfunction	Hyper-vigilance	Hopelessness	Loss of faith

These signs and symptoms usually disappear within a few days. Less often, such incidents may cause a more prolonged stress reaction. Research suggests that this occurs about 19% of the time in emergency service personnel, depending on certain variables in the incident. On the back of this page is a list of things you can do to help minimize the symptoms. **If stress symptoms last more than four weeks, contact a Team peer member for referral for additional assistance.**

TECHNIQUES FOR HANDLING STRESS REACTIONS

1. Handling the adrenaline rush symptoms:
 - Exercise to the point where you sweat.
 - Drink plenty of water. This helps flush out the chemicals that pour into your body after a critical incident.
 - Make a conscious effort to breathe deeply or do "tactical breathing."
 - Eat small meals high in protein.
 - Excessive amounts of sugar, caffeine, or alcohol will MAKE YOUR SYMPTOMS WORSE. Alcohol will especially worsen any feelings of depression you are having.
2. Return to your routine schedule as soon as you are able to do so. A familiar routine helps anchor you while your thoughts and emotions settling down.
3. Rest a bit more. If you find that you have having trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep (and you previously did not have trouble) take a special note: worrying about sleeping won't help you get to sleep! If you can't sleep after 15 minutes, get out of bed and do something quiet and boring until you are sleepy. If sleep disruption remains a problem four weeks after the incident or it worsens, seek help. (See below.)
4. Talk to family, friends, a Chaplain, a minister, or co-workers that you trust. Talking actually changes brain chemistry. The more you talk about the incident, the sooner it will be over in your mind and body.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE

- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are not necessarily abnormal. They can be your brain's way of incorporating what has happened. Allow yourself to feel more comfortable through them and let them pass without fighting them. They should decrease over several weeks. If not, seek help.
- If you were feeling stressed or had difficult worries before the incident, your feelings about these and your attempts to cope with them may worsen with the effects of the incident. Now would be a good time to talk to someone about these stresses.

If any of the symptoms on the reverse side of this page are very bothersome, worsen, or do not improve in four (4) weeks, seek additional assistance by: 1) contacting you Employee Assistance Provider, 2) contacting a mental health professional, or 3) contacting the Metro Critical Incident Stress Management Team at (612) 207-1130 or www.metroCISM.org for referrals.

