

FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Your family member or friend has just experience a critical incident. He/she has been exposed to sights, sounds, smells, thoughts or work demands that exceed normal working conditions or life experiences. Even though the event is over, reactions may continue to occur for several hours to several days after the event. 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

Suffering stress reactions from the effects of a critical incident is completely normal. Your loved one is not the only one suffering; other emergency service personnel shared the event and are probably having similar reactions, even if they are not talking about it. Your loved one may experience a variety of these signs and symptoms, or he/she may not feel any of them. At times you may be aware of the symptoms, but he or she may not. In general, these reactions subside after a few days. **If the stress symptoms last more than four weeks, contact your Employee Assistance Provider, a Mental Health Professional or a Critical Incident Stress Management Team member by calling 612-207-1130.**

Being close to someone who is struggling with a reaction to a critical incident can be difficult. Your family member or friend might demonstrate the following relational symptoms: isolation, clamming up, resentment, irritability, intolerance, lashing out, hiding, loneliness, fewer contacts with friends, lack of intimacy, lower sex drive, and nagging. Responses such as these are not necessarily abnormal in the short-term. *If they represent a real change from the person's functioning before the incident and they last longer than four weeks or seem to worsen in the four week time period, you and/or the individual should seek help. (See below.)*

TECHNIQUES FOR HANDLING STRESS REACTIONS

- ➔ Talking about the incident and one's reaction is helpful in getting over the initial reactions to it. Human beings, in general, recover more quickly from difficulties if they talk about them. Encourage, but do not pressure, your loved one to talk about it.
- ➔ If your loved one does talk about the incident, remember that just simply listening is the most helpful thing that you can do. It is not helpful to tell him or her they are lucky it wasn't worse, etc.
- ➔ Take your loved one's emotional reactions seriously *but not personally*. Try to remember that he/she is experiencing intense physical and emotional reactions.
- ➔ Do offer concrete assistance. Offer to help with their regular household duties, help with the children and don't be afraid to ask what you can do that he/she would consider helpful.
- ➔ Sometimes critical incidents trigger thoughts about important life issues including mortality. It can be a relief to talk about these thoughts and issues. They do not need to be avoided in order to keep your loved one from becoming more upset.

△ Remember if the event is upsetting to your loved one, you and your children may also be affected. You may also need to talk to someone that can help you. Your children may sense the tension in the household even if they are not told what has happened. Briefly explain *honestly* what has happened and watch for stress reactions in them as well.

If symptoms become bothersome, worsen over time or do not subside after four weeks, consider seeking further assistance. You can access additional assistance by contacting your Employee Assistance Provider (EAP), a Mental Health Professional or a Critical Incident Stress Management Team Member at **612-207-1130** or **www.metrocism.org**. The Team can refer you to other helpful resources.

