

Critical Event Stress – Information Sheet

You have experienced a traumatic event. 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 moved through a difficult event.

Sometimes the emotional 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 or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the event. With the understanding and the support of friends and those close to us, stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, a traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular trauma was just too powerful to manage without support.

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

Physical Signs

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Muscle tremors
- Twitches
- Chest pain*
- Difficulty breathing*

- Elevated blood pressure
- Rapid heart rate
- Thirst
- Visual difficulties
- Vomiting
- Grinding of teeth
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Chills
- Fainting

* Seek medical help with these symptoms

Cognitive Signs

- Blaming someone
- Confusion
- Poor attention
- Poor decisions
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Memory problems
- Hyper vigilance
- 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 images

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Emotional Signs

- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Grief
- Denial
- Emotional shock
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Inappropriate emotional response
- Apprehension
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Intense anger
- Irritability
- Agitation

Behavioural Signs

- Change in activity
- Change in speech patterns
- Withdrawal
- Emotional outbursts
- Suspiciousness
- Change in usual communications
- Loss or increase of appetite
- Alcohol consumption
- Inability to rest
- Antisocial acts
- Nonspecific bodily complaints
- Hyper alert to environment
- Pacing
- Erratic movements
- Change in sexual functioning

Coping Suggestions

- Give yourself permission and TIME to grieve/adjust.
- Focus on your strengths and coping skills.
- Ask for support and help from your family, friends, church or other community resources. Join or develop support groups.
- Redefine your priorities and focus your energy and resources on those priorities.
- Set small realistic goals to help tackle obstacles. For example, reestablish daily routines for yourself and your family.
- Remember that men and women react differently. Women tend to be caretakers and put others first. Men have difficulty acknowledging and expressing feelings of helplessness and sadness and believe in "toughing it out."
- Eat healthy meals and exercise.
- Avoid numbing the pain with alcohol (or other drugs).
- Get enough rest to increase your reserve strength.
- Acknowledge unresolved issues and use the hurt and pain as a motivator to make the necessary changes to heal.
- Continue to educate yourself and family about normal reactions to a traumatic event.
- Talk to your family members and friends. Be supportive to others. Set an example by expressing your feelings and showing problem solving skills in dealing with family problems.
- If you have not already been made aware of where to seek assistance, contact your local GP, family doctor or Community Health Centre.
- Remember that you are not alone.

For further information or counselling contact Converge International on 1300 687 327.



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