

# Critical Incident Stress Management

## Participant's Guide



## Critical Incident Stress Information

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident that may cause you to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with your ability to function. 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 traumatic event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (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 severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the 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 event was just too powerful for the person to manage by him or herself.

## **I. Purpose of Today's Discussion:**

- To support your recovery from a critical incident
- To help you understand that your responses are normal reactions to an abnormal event

### **Ground Rules:**

- You do not have to talk, but remember that your words may serve to reassure and support your colleagues.
- The group is limited to those directly impacted by the incident.
- This is not an environment to critique what you or anyone else did or did not do. It is meant to be supportive and educational.
- Confidentiality – we agree not to share information about what is said in this room. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

## **II. Reviewing the Situation**

- Share your name and role in the organization.
- Have you been through this type of experience before?
- Describe what happened.
- What was your first thought when you saw and heard what was happening?
- What were you feeling during the incident?
- What was the worst part of the incident for you?
- What are you experiencing now?

## **Understanding Your Reactions**

### **A normal reaction to an abnormal situation**

- Your feelings are probably quite normal and natural even though they may seem unusual.
- We are all individuals; we all respond in our own unique way.
- The incident cannot be erased. The memory will always be a part of your life.
- Everyone will move at his/her own pace through the stages of crisis and healing.
- There is no accurate predetermined length of time for recovering from a crisis or traumatic event.
- For some people, there may be ongoing problems.

## Feelings and/or Possible Reactions

Numbness	Flashbacks
Crying	Regression
Fatigue	Confusion
Sleep disturbances	Feeling overwhelmed
Change in appetite/weight	Feeling inadequate
Low resistance to illness	Frustration
Concentration problems	Helplessness
Memory problems	Irritability
Religious confusion	Depression
Loss of trust	Despair
Anniversary difficulties	Grief
Alcohol/drug abuse	Guilt
Excessive use of sick leave	Anger
Work/school/family problems	Outrage
Difficulty returning to normal activity levels	Insecurity
Suicidal thoughts	Anxiety
Withdrawal	Self-doubt

## Here are some common signs and signals of stress reaction

Physical*	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
Chills	Confusion	Fear	Withdrawal
Thirst	Nightmares	Guilt	Antisocial acts
Fatigue	Uncertainty	Grief	Inability to rest
Nausea	Hypervigilance	Panic	Intensified pacing
Fainting movements	Suspiciousness	Denial	Erratic
Twitches	Intrusive images	Anxiety	Change in social activity
Vomiting	Blaming someone	Agitation	Change in speech patterns
Dizziness	Poor problem solving	Irritability	Loss or increase of appetite
Weakness	Poor abstract thinking	Depression	Hyperalert to environment
Chest pain	Poor attention/ concentration	Intense anger	Increased alcohol consumption
Headaches	Poor concentration/	Apprehension	Change in usual communication
Elevated BP	Disorientation of time, place or person	Emotional shock	
Rapid heart rate	Difficulty identifying objects or people	Emotional outbursts	
Muscle tremors	Heightened or lowered alertness	Feeling overwhelmed	
Shock symptoms	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	Loss of emotional control	
Grinding of teeth		Inappropriate emotional response	
Visual difficulties			
Profuse sweating			
Difficulty breathing			

**\*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.**

## Taking Care of Yourself

### Things to Try

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 healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol; you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out – people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- 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.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.



# **CHI St. Alexius Health**

## **Employee Assistance Program**

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