

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET

by LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

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 passed through a horrible 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 the understanding and the support of loved ones, 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 trauma was just too powerful to manage without help.

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

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Muscle tremors
- Twitches
- * Chest pain
- * Difficulty breathing
- Elevated BP
- Rapid heart rate
- Thirst
- Visual difficulties
- Vomiting
- Grinding of teeth
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Chills
- * Shock symptoms
- Fainting
- etc.

COGNITIVE SIGNS

- Blaming someone
- Confusion
- Poor attention
- Poor decisions
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Memory problems
- Hypervigilance
- 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
- etc.

EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Grief
- Denial
- Severe panic (rare)
- Emotional shock
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Inappropriate emotional response
- Apprehension
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Intense anger
- Irritability
- Agitation
- etc.

BEHAVIORAL 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
- Hyperalert to environment
- Startle reflex intensified
- Pacing
- Erratic movements
- Change in sexual functioning
- etc.

* Definite indication of the need for medical evaluation!