



Empowering relationships...

## Redwood Empire Chapter

of California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists

### **Critical Incident Stress Information Handout**

#### ***Things to try:***

- WITHIN THE FIRST HOURS and DAYS periods of strenuous exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure some of your time - keep fairly busy but not too busy.
- You are a normal person who has experienced an abnormal event so don't label yourself as crazy.
- Be aware of the tendency to numb the pain with the overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out - most people really do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing your own feelings and checking out how they're doing as well.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten.
- Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you - spend more time in recreation than performing large-scale chores.
- Realize that those around you are probably under stress as well.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat answer them even if you're not sure.

#### ***For Family Members and Friends:***

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding the children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" - traumatized people are not consoled by these statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.

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*For a directory of licensed mental health providers in Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino and Napa counties, please visit*

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### Common Reactions to A Critical Incident

You have been exposed to a traumatic event known as a critical incident. Here are some common signs and signals that others have reported when they have been exposed to such an incident. These are typical reactions to a traumatic event that can be experienced immediately, during, and/or following the event. These signs and symptoms usually appear in combination and may also be related to other stressors as well. This list is certainly not inclusive of all types of stress reactions but it is generally representative of the signs and symptoms typically associated with traumatic events. This list of common reactions is simply being offered here as a starting point for you to become more familiar with some of your own reactions to this particular incident. It should also be emphasized that no two people are likely to experience the exact same combination of reactions to any given stressor(s). Again, these are typical reactions and should be considered as normal responses by normal people when exposed to abnormal events. Additional support is available to help speed up your recovery.

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

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>
chills	confusion	fear	withdrawal
thirst	nightmares	guilt	antisocial acts
fatigue	uncertainty	grief	inability to rest
nausea	hyper-vigilance	panic	intensified pacing
fainting	suspiciousness	denial	erratic movements
diarrhea	persistent intrusive images	crying	changes in social
vomiting	blaming someone	sadness	activity
dizziness	poor problem solving	irritability	change in speech
weakness	poor abstract thinking	depression	patterns
chest pain	poor attention/decisions	intense anger	loss or increase of
headaches	poor concentration/memory	apprehension	appetite
elevated BP	disorientation of time, place	emotional shock	hyper-alert to
rapid heart rate	person	extreme agitation	environment
muscle tremors	difficulty identifying	feeling overwhelmed	increased alcohol
shock symptoms	objects or people	loss of emotional	consumption
grinding teeth	heightened or lowered	control	change in usual
visual difficulties	alertness	inappropriate emotional	communications
profuse sweating	increased or decreased	responses	change in usual
difficulty breathing	awareness of surroundings	extreme helplessness	habits
etc...	etc...	etc...	etc...

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

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**Note: If you find that these symptoms persist in such a way as to interfere with your ability to function at work, at school, and/or at home, you are strongly encouraged to contact a qualified healthcare professional for assistance.**

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