

COMMON SYMPTOMS AFTER A CRITICAL INCIDENT

After experiencing a traumatic event, it is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience a wide range of emotional or physical reactions. These responses may appear immediately after the event, or some time later. They may last for a few days, a few weeks, or even longer. **Don't worry** - these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. It is important to understand that like the flu, your reactions will run their course and you will feel better in time. The following are some of the most common symptoms:

Emotional

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Depression, Sadness, Grief
- Feeling hopeless or Helplessness
- Feeling Numb
- Irritability
- Inappropriate Emotional Response
- Anger
- Guilt, survivor guilt
- Denial
- Agitation
- Feeling overwhelmed

Behavioral

- Social withdrawal/Silence
- Hyper-alert to environment
- Suspiciousness
- Emotional outbursts, loss of control
- Changes from typical behavioral
- Avoiding thoughts, feelings or situations related to the event
- Changes in communication
- Change in sexual function
- Increased consumption of alcohol or other chemicals
- Loss or increase of appetite
- Inability to rest

Cognitive (Thoughts)

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Memory problems
- Shortened attention span
- Overly critical
- Preoccupation with the event
- Flashbacks
- Hyper-vigilance
- Overly sensitive

Physical

- Easily startled/Jittery
- Fatigue
- Changes in appetite
- Sleep disturbances and nightmares
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Nausea/Diarrhea
- Shallow breathing
- Twitches/Tremors
- Dizziness/Faintness
- Chills/Sweating

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

When you've experienced a trauma, it can be a shock to your whole system. The following are some ideas to help you cope with any physical or emotional symptoms you may be experiencing.

Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if you don't feel like it

Get plenty of rest.

Exercise regularly. It can help work off some physical symptoms, leaving you feeling calmer and better able to relax. If you are feeling lethargic it can help energize you and clear your mind.

Avoid caffeine, especially if you are having trouble sleeping.

Avoid the use of drugs or alcohol, including prescription and over the counter to numb the pain. It will only complicate or delay your recovery.

Structure your time and set priorities. Maintain your basic normal routine, but give yourself permission to skip the extras for a while.

Don't make any major life changes or decisions.

Do make as many small daily decisions as possible to reassert your sense of control.

Don't try to avoid or deny reoccurring thoughts or feelings about the incident. They are normal and will decrease over time.

Give yourself permission to feel rotten and to share your feelings with others.

Do things that you enjoy. Take mini-breaks: go out to dinner, take 10 minutes alone, watch a movie.

Talk with people you trust: your family, friends, co-workers. Don't be afraid to reach out. People do care.

Don't be afraid to set limits with others when you don't feel like talking. You don't have to discuss the incident or your feelings when you don't want to.

Don't label yourself as "crazy." Remind yourself you are having normal reactions.

Write down your thoughts and feelings. This can be especially helpful if you are having trouble sleeping or when you wake from a troubling dream.

Ask for help if you need it. If you are having trouble coping on your own help is available from many sources:

- Professional assistance from a counselor may sometimes be necessary. This does not imply weakness or craziness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful to handle by yourself.
- In the workplace you may be able to get assistance from your co-workers, the human resources department, or company EAP.

Church, friends, family, and other community resources can be valuable sources of support.

