

More Hints on How to Cope

- Realize **those around** you are also under stress.
- Do **NOT** make any big **life changes or decisions**.
- DO make as many **daily decisions** as possible. This will give you a feeling of **control** over your life. *Example: If someone asks you what you want to eat, answer, even if you're not sure.*
- Get plenty of **rest**.
- If you **can't** get to **sleep**, get up and **write, read**, or do household **chores**, and then try again. *Do not lie in bed trying to get to sleep.*
- Recurring **thoughts, dreams, and flashbacks** are **normal** — don't try to fight them — *they should decrease over time and become less painful.*
- Eat **well-balanced meals** at regular intervals — *even if you don't feel like it.*
- You have experienced a loss, give yourself permission to **grieve** or **cry**. *Tears are how we say "I care" when words are not enough.*
- Do NOT expect **others** to **understand**, but DO *let them know you are hurting.*
- Recognize that your **family members** may have suffered a loss, too (*a loss of security, etc.*). *Therefore, they may not be able to say the things you think they should.*

How Family & Friends Can Help

- ♦ **Listen** carefully to understand and not to "fix" the situation..
- ♦ Spend **time** with the traumatized person.
- ♦ Offer your **assistance** and listening ear, even if they have not asked for help.
- ♦ Answer the **phone** for them and refer **media** inquiries to a competent spokesperson.
- ♦ **Reassure** them that they are **safe**.
- ♦ **Help** them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, or childcare.
- ♦ Give them some **private time**.
- ♦ **DO NOT** take **their feelings** (*i.e. anger*), personally.
- ♦ **Expect** that it will take **days** and **weeks** for them to **work through the emotions** and loss they have experienced.
- ♦ **DO NOT** try to make it better by using phrases such as "**I know how you feel**", "**lucky it wasn't worse**", or "**at least you weren't hurt**". Such statements **do not console traumatized people**.
- ♦ **DO NOT** tell them to "**get over it**" as this will alienate them, decrease communications, & increase isolation.
- ♦ **DO tell** them that **you are sorry** that such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them. **LISTEN** to their story!

Coping In Times of Stress



Victim Services Unit

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www.icisf.org

What is Critical Incident Stress?

ANY incident or traumatic event (*death, divorce, injury/illness, loss of job, etc.*) that causes you to experience unusually **strong emotional reactions** which have the **potential** to interfere with your ability to function at the time of the event or later.

What can you expect?

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 some people to experience “*emotional aftershock*” when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the **emotional aftershocks** (or *stress reactions*) **appear immediately** after the traumatic event. At other times they may appear a few hours or a few days **later**. *In some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reaction appears.*

How long will the effects last?

The **signs and symptoms of 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 may **pass more quickly and might be easier to deal with**.

There are times when the traumatic event is so painful that **professional assistance** from a counselor is necessary. *This does not imply weakness or mental illness.* It simply indicates the event was so powerful that a person may need additional **help to recover**.

Signs & Signals of Stress

Physical	Cognitive
Chills Thirst Fatigue Nausea Fainting Twitches Vomiting Dizziness Weakness Chest pain Headaches Elevated blood pressure Rapid heart rate Muscle tremors Shock symptoms Grinding of teeth Visual difficulties Profuse sweating Difficulty breathing	Confusion Nightmares Uncertainty Hyper-vigilance Suspiciousness Intrusive images/thoughts Blaming someone/self Poor problem solving Poor abstract thinking Poor attention Poor decisions Poor memory Poor concentration Disorientation Difficulty in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognition • alertness • awareness of surroundings, etc.
Emotional	Behavioral
Fear Guilt Grief Panic Denial Anxiety Agitation Irritability Depression Intense anger Apprehension Emotional shock Feeling overwhelmed Loss of emotional control	Withdrawal Antisocial acts Inability to rest Intensified pacing Erratic movements Shift in social activity Change in appetite Hyper-alert Increased alcohol use Change in usual communications Emotional outburst, tears, and crying spells “Gallows Humor”

Things to Try

Talking to people who will really listen is an important part of the healing process.

- **Drink lots of water** — it will help your body **eliminate** some of the **chemical toxins** created by stress.
- **Avoid** attempts to numb the pain with **drugs** and **alcohol** (*These could impede your ability to heal and may delay your journey to normalcy*).
- Within the first 24 to 48 hours, periods of appropriate **physical exercise**, alternated with **relaxation** will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time — **keep busy**.
- Keep a **journal**, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- **DO** the **appropriate things** that make you **feel good**.
- **Reach out** — you will find **people** do **care** although they may not know what to say.
- Maintain a **normal schedule** as much as possible.
- Spend **time** with **others**.
- **Help** your **co-workers** by **sharing your feelings** and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself **permission** to **feel rotten** and share your feelings with others.
- Remember, much of what is experienced is a **normal reaction** to an abnormal situation or event.
- *Don't label yourself crazy!*