SURREY FIRE SERVICE
CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT TEAM

CISM
DEFUSING/
DEBRIEFING

“HANDOUTS”
Common Signs and Symptoms During a CIS Event

You have experienced a traumatic event, or a critical incident. Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing, or may experience later, some strong reactions to it. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the stress reactions appear immediately after the traumatic event, or they may appear a few hours or days later. 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, weeks, months, or even longer. With the understanding and support of loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, a traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counsellor may be necessary. This only indicates that the traumatic event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Stress reactions can affect a person physically, emotionally, behaviourally, or cognitively (how your mind works). Some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nausea, Upset stomach, sweating</td>
<td>Impaired thinking/decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart rate and blood pressure increase</td>
<td>Poor concentration/memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle soreness, fatigue</td>
<td>Difficulty with abstract thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperventilation, chest pains</td>
<td>Flashbacks/poor attention span</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitches, thirst, headaches</td>
<td>Time distortion/perception alteration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness, fainting</td>
<td>Blaming someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chills, profuse sweating</td>
<td>Difficulty identifying people/objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinding of teeth</td>
<td>Nightmares/intrusive images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disturbed thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Behavioural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety, guilt and fear</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief/depression</td>
<td>Change in activity, speech or patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Numbing</td>
<td>Emotional outbursts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling lost, abandoned, helpless</td>
<td>Suspiciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal/anger</td>
<td>Loss/Increase in appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling numb/shocked, overwhelmed</td>
<td>Alcohol consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial, uncertainty, apprehensive</td>
<td>Startle reflex intensified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability, agitation</td>
<td>Inability to rest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction are:
Delayed Stress Response Syndrome

Sometimes a stress response can be delayed, and the victim may not think it is associated with the traumatic event. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Increased feelings of depression, anxiety and irritability
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating habits
- Loss of emotional control
- Feeling of isolation
- Lowering sexual drive
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Lowered interest in loved ones
- Marital conflict

If the condition becomes more acute, the victim may experience:

- Intrusive memories
- Fear of repetition of the event

After experiencing a traumatic event, be aware of any PHYSICAL, BEHAVIOURAL, COGNITIVE, OR EMOTIONAL changes.
FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT THE SEVERITY OF A REACTION TO A TRAUMATIC EVENT

- Severity and nature of event
- Role of worker
- Level of responsibility associated with the incident (the greater the responsibility, the greater the potential for impact)
- Knowing the victim
- Victim is similar to someone known to worker
- Worker is experiencing stress in life already (divorce, death in family, etc...)
- Workers’ previous experience with personal crisis - could help through desensitization, or hinder through cumulative stress
- Media involvement/interference
- Behaviour of others at the incident (effective, ineffective)
- Preparedness for the incident (details known enroute, training updated and maintained, etc)
- Knowledge and awareness of CIS Management
- Availability of appropriate support services (MFAP, peer defusers, management support)
- Support or ostracism by co-workers, family, or general public
“DO’S AND DON’TS”

For the **Survivor** of a Traumatic Incident

These examples of coping skills may assist recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DO:</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TALK ABOUT THE INCIDENT</td>
<td>Drink alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect the incident to bother you</td>
<td>Use legal or illegal substances to numb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a good diet and exercise, alternating with rest</td>
<td>Withdraw from family, friends, and co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take time for leisure activities, and get plenty of rest</td>
<td>Automatically stay away from work or other obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind yourself that post-traumatic reactions are normal</td>
<td>Use off-duty time for training immediately after the incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn as much as possible about Critical Incident Stress</td>
<td>Look for easy answers to explain the reason for the incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with family, friends and co-workers</td>
<td>Think you are “crazy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Get extra help, if necessary</strong></td>
<td>Have unrealistic expectations for recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure your time – keep busy</td>
<td>Make big life changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach out – people do care</td>
<td>Fight any reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks – they will decrease over time and become less painful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give yourself permission to feel rotten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep a journal – write your way through those sleepless hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help co-workers by sharing your feelings, and checking to see how they are doing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advice for the Family, Friends and Co-Workers of Survivors of Critical Incident Stress.

1. Encourage them to talk to you about how they are feeling about the incident.
2. Tell them how you feel, that you are sorry that they have been hurt, had to go through this experience, that it must have been hard for them, etc.
3. It is OK to remind them that confusing feelings are a common/normal reaction.
4. Don’t attempt to reassure them that everything is OK. IT IS NOT! (Don’t try to fix it for them)
5. Don’t attempt to impose your explanation on why this has happened to them.
6. Don’t tell them that you know how they feel. You don’t. Often such attempts are really aimed at relieving your own anxiety about how you feel about the incident.
7. BE WILLING TO SAY NOTHING. JUST BEING THERE IS OFTEN THE BIGGEST HELP FOR THESE SURVIVORS.
8. Don’t be afraid to ask how someone is doing. This provides the opportunity for them to tell you as much or as little as they need to (or that they want to share). You call them, as often it will be much harder for the survivor to call you.
9. Don’t be afraid to encourage them to get post-trauma counseling from a specially trained professional counselor (mental health professional).

Remember that as a person who cares for the survivor of a traumatic event, you are a CO-SURVIVOR. You must also expect that you will experience post-trauma consequences.
“DO’S AND DON’TS”

For Family and Friends of a Traumatic Incident Survivor

Stress reactions are a natural result of experiencing a traumatic event, and it takes time and effort to recover. Family, friends and co-workers can be more effective when helping the griever if they know what helps and what doesn’t.

These examples of coping skills may assist your loved ones’ recovery

**DO:**

Tell them that you are sorry for their pain

Give practical assistance at home (meals, cleaning, kids to school, etc)

Allow the griever to talk and express feelings

Encourage good eating and exercise habits

Be aware that eating and sleeping patterns may change

Reach out to the griever, as it is difficult for them to reach out to you

Remind them that the stress reactions are normal

Be willing to say nothing. Just being there is often the biggest help for them

Encourage them to get post-trauma counseling from a trained professional

Ask how they are doing

**DON’T:**

Suggest that they have grieved long enough

Discourage crying

Change the subject when they talk about it

Suggest they are doing well by not showing their emotions

Exclude them from social activities

Be afraid to talk about the incident/deceased

Tell them everything is OK. IT IS NOT

Attempt to explain why this has happened to them

Tell them that you know how they feel. You don’t
SURREY FIRE SERVICE
CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT TEAM

Critical Incident Stress Personal Report Form

Instructions for filling out this form:

1. As soon as possible after the CISM Defusing, fill out the summary form. When necessary use the back of the form if more space is required. Keep in mind that the notes are your own personal thoughts about the incident. The form will be stored in your union file in the union office in a sealed envelope. It will only be used in the event of a future psychological disability claim.
2. Place completed form in the envelope and seal it.
3. Send the sealed envelope to a Union Executive member.

Incident number ______________________
Date of Defusing _____________________
Time of Defusing _____________________

Summary:
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

- This form is to be used as possible documentation for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder claims.
- This form should be kept on file with your personal documents and records in the union office.