



SURREY FIRE SERVICE
CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT TEAM



CISM

DEFUSING/ DEBRIEFING

"HANDOUTS"





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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:

Physical

Nausea, Upset stomach, sweating
Heart rate and blood pressure increase
Muscle soreness, fatigue
Hyperventilation, chest pains
Twitches, thirst, headaches
Dizziness, fainting
Chills, profuse sweating
Grinding of teeth

Cognitive

Impaired thinking/decision making
Poor concentration/memory
Difficulty with abstract thoughts
Flashbacks/poor attention span
Time distortion/perception alteration
Blaming someone
Difficulty identifying people/objects
Nightmares/intrusive images
Disturbed thinking

Emotional

Anxiety, guilt and fear
Grief/depression
Emotional Numbing
Feeling lost, abandoned, helpless
Withdrawal/anger
Feeling numb/shocked, over whelmed
Denial, uncertainty, apprehensive
Irritability, agitation

Behavioural

Withdrawal
Change in activity, speech or patterns
Emotional outbursts
Suspiciousness
Loss/Increase in appetite
Alcohol consumption
Startle reflex intensified
Inability to rest



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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.



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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



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“DO’S AND DON’TS”

*For the **Survivor** of a Traumatic Incident*

These examples of coping skills may assist recovery

DO:

TALK ABOUT THE INCIDENT

Expect the incident to bother you

Maintain a good diet and exercise,
alternating with rest

Take time for leisure activities, and
get plenty of rest

Remind yourself that post-traumatic
reactions are normal

Learn as much as possible about
Critical Incident Stress

Spend time with family, friends and co-
workers

Get extra help, if necessary

Structure your time – keep busy

Reach out – people do care

Give yourself permission to feel rotten

Keep a journal – write your way through
those sleepless hours

Help co-workers by sharing your feelings,
and checking to see how they are doing

DON’T:

Drink alcohol

Use legal or illegal substances to numb

Withdraw from family, friends, and co-
workers

Automatically stay away from work or other
obligations

Use off-duty time for training immediately
after the incident

Look for easy answers to explain the reason
for the incident

Think you are “crazy”

Have unrealistic expectations for recovery

Make big life changes

Fight any reoccurring thoughts , dreams or
flashbacks – they will decrease over time
and become less painful



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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.



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“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



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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.