



CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS – COMMON REACTIONS

You have just experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident. People will react in different ways to these unexpected life events.

You may experience, now or later, one or more of the following strong physical, cognitive, emotional or behavioural reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience stress reactions (or emotional aftershocks) when they have experienced a critical incident. They can unbalance our well-being and security, and temporarily impair our ability to function normally. Sometimes they may appear immediately, a few hours or days later, and in some cases, delayed for weeks depending on the severity of the traumatic event.

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE
Nausea	Confusion
Upset stomach	Lowered attention span
Tremors (lips, hands)	Calculation difficulties
Feeling uncoordinated	Memory problems
Profuse sweating	Poor concentration
Chills	Seeing an event over and over
Diarrhea	Distressing dreams
Rapid heart rate	Disruption in logical thinking
Muscle aches	Blaming someone
Sleep disturbance	
Dry mouth	
Shakes	
Vision problems	
Fatigue	
EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIOURAL
Anticipatory anxiety	Change in activity
Denial	Withdrawal
Fear	Suspiciousness
Survivor guilt	Change in communications
Uncertainty of feelings	Change in interactions with others
Depression	Increased or decreased food intake
Grief	Increased smoking
Feeling hopeless	Increased alcohol intake
Feeling overwhelmed	Overly vigilant to environment
Feeling lost or abandoned	Excessive humour
Worried	Excessive silence
Wishing to hide	Unusual behaviour
Wishing to die	
Anger	
Feeling numb	
Identifying with victim	

Source: J. Mitchell/G. Brady