Critical Incident Stress Management

Educational Information Concerning Critical Incidents

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident which is defined as any incident that causes emergency service personnel to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability at the scene or later. 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 people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

The signs and symptoms of a 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.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Physical** \* | **Cognitive** | **Emotional** | **Behavioral** |
| Chills  Thirst  Fatigue  Nausea  Fainting  Twitches  Vomiting  Dizziness  Weakness  Chest Pain  Headaches  Elevated BP  Rapid Heart Rate  Muscle Tremors  Shock Symptoms  Grinding of Teeth  Visual Difficulties  Profuse Sweating  Difficulty Breathing,  Etc | Confusion  Nightmares  Uncertainty  Hypervigilance  Suspiciousness  Intrusive images  Blaming someone  Poor problem solving  Poor abstract thinking  Poor attention /decisions  Poor concentration/memory  Disorientation of time, place or person  Difficulty identifying objects or people  Heightened or lowered alertness  Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings  Etc. | Fear  Guilt  Grief  Panic  Denial  Anxiety  Agitation  Irritability  Depression  Intense anger  Apprehension  Emotional shock  Emotional outbursts  Feeling overwhelmed  Loss of emotional control  Inappropriate emotional response  Etc. | Withdrawal  Antisocial acts  Inability to rest  Intensified pacing  Erratic movements  Change in social activity  Change in speech patterns  Loss or increase of appetite  Hyperalter to environment  Increase alcohol consumption  Change in usual communications  Etc. |

*\*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.*

*International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc. 1996 All Rights Reserved*